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THE STORY OF THE
RESURRECTION

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THE STORY OF THE PASSION
Its Own Message Considered in Addresses

THE FOUNDATIONS OF FAITH
Bampton Lectures, 1879

PROPHECY: JEWISH AND CHRISTIAN
Sermons at Lincoln's Inn

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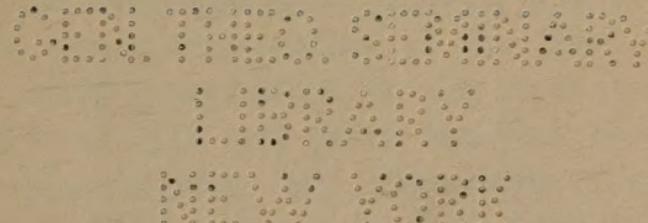
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THE STORY OF THE RESURRECTION

BY HENRY WACE, D.D.

DEAN OF CANTERBURY

HONORARY FELLOW OF BRASENOSE COLLEGE, OXFORD, AND OF
KING'S COLLEGE, LONDON
SOMETIME PREACHER OF LINCOLN'S INN



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PREFACE

THESE Addresses on "The Story of the Resurrection" are the sequel to those on "The Story of the Passion," already published. Like those, they were delivered during Holy Week in Canterbury Cathedral, in successive years; and this will, I hope, excuse occasional repetitions of statement. Their first purpose is to assist in appreciating the narratives of the Evangelists, and thus to enable the story there told of the acts and words of our Lord to be more fully realised.

But though they were not written with either a dogmatic or an apologetic purpose, it is hoped that this simple appreciation of the Story will afford a vivid presentation of the great truths revealed by it, and will prove the best defence of its trustworthiness. The Evangelists are witnesses, telling their story in the face of the world; and I believe that that story carries its own best evidence in itself. Criticism has a useful part to play in explaining difficulties of detail; but it is the simple, quiet, testimony of these

witnesses that brings conviction to fair minds. In the same way, the Gospels throughout are perpetually bearing witness before the world, and command trust by the mere force of their personal testimony—a force, as the Church has ever believed, due to special inspiration.

It is my hope, therefore, that these meditations on the narratives of the Passion and the Resurrection may together be regarded as having more than a devotional value. More than forty years ago, I was asked by the father of my present publisher and friend to write on the evidences of Christianity ; and though I regret failing to comply with his kind wish at that time, I am glad that I did not then attempt a task for which my spiritual experience would have been sadly unequal. I was soon afterwards desired by Bishop Jackson, of London, to deliver the Boyle Lectures ; and the duty has since fallen to me, as in the posts of Bampton and Warburton Lecturer, and in other public controversy, to treat various branches of Christian evidence. But at the age of eighty-six, in the last book I am likely to write, I am happy to think I am leaving, as a more material tribute to that great study, two small volumes, which present the cardinal truths of the Christian Faith as they were uttered by our Lord Himself on the Cross, and when risen from the grave. In the Evangelical narratives those truths are presented

in their original form, straight from His mouth, uncoloured by subsequent theology or philosophy. The best “reconstruction of belief,” if that be needed, will be found in bringing it back to its fountain-head, and learning it from the lips of the dying and living Lord.

So far as these Addresses assist in that work, I could wish them to supersede all that I have presumed to write on these subjects. It seems to me that in these supreme acts and words of our Lord the whole Christian Faith finds at once its statement, its authority, and its claim on our consciences and minds. Let men only be induced to listen thoughtfully to Him, as He speaks from the Cross and from His Resurrection and Ascension, and the allegiance of their hearts will be won.

HENRY WACE.

THE DEANERY,
CANTERBURY,
Easter, 1923.

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I
THE DAWN

" Now late on the Sabbath day, as it began to dawn toward the first *day* of the week, came Mary Magdalene and the other Mary to see the sepulchre. And behold, there was a great earthquake ; for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven, and came and rolled away the stone, and sat upon it. His appearance was as lightning, and his raiment white as snow : and for fear of him the watchers did quake, and became as dead men. And the angel answered and said unto the women, Fear not ye : for I know that ye seek Jesus, which hath been crucified. He is not here ; for He is risen, even as He said. Come, see the place where the Lord lay. And go quickly, and tell His disciples, He is risen from the dead ; and lo, He goeth before you into Galilee ; there shall ye see Him : lo, I have told you."—ST. MATTHEW xxviii. 1-7.

" And when the Sabbath was past, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome, bought spices, that they might come and anoint Him. And very early on the first day of the week, they come to the tomb when the sun was risen. And they were saying among themselves, Who shall roll us away the stone from the door of the tomb ? and looking up, they see that the stone is rolled back : for it was exceeding great. And entering into the tomb, they saw a young man sitting on the right side, arrayed in a white robe ; and they were amazed. And he saith unto them, Be not amazed : ye seek Jesus, the Nazarene, which hath been crucified : He is risen ; He is not here : behold, the place where they laid Him ! But go, tell His disciples and Peter, He goeth before you into Galilee : there shall ye see Him, as He said unto you."—ST. MARK xvi. 1-7.

" But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they came unto the tomb, bringing the spices which they had prepared. And they found the stone rolled away from the tomb. And they entered in, and found not the body of the Lord Jesus. And it came to pass, while they were perplexed thereabout, behold, two men stood by them in dazzling apparel : and as they were affrighted, and bowed down their faces to the earth, they said unto them, Why seek ye the living among the dead ? He is not here, but is risen : remember how He spake unto you when He was yet in Galilee, saying that the Son of man must be delivered up into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and the third day rise again."—ST. LUKE xxiv. 1-7.

THE STORY OF THE RESURRECTION

I

THE DAWN

FOR thirteen years past, I have had the duty and the privilege of following step by step, and endeavouring to realise better, the history of our Lord's Passion, beginning with His apprehension and trial, and ending last year with the narrative of His burial. This year I invite you to proceed with me to consider the blessed events which followed that grievous story, in the narratives of our Lord's Resurrection, of His appearances to His disciples, and of the momentous words which He spoke to them. It is a subject which will, I think, be felt to be peculiarly appropriate for our consideration at the present time, for the scenes through which we have been living during the War have brought home to us with intense force the realities of life beyond the grave, and have invested with supreme value the witness to them which is afforded by our Lord's Resurrection. We have no other definite and authoritative witness to those realities except that of our

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Lord and His Apostles ; and at a time when the hearts of men and women are yearning after some illumination of the existence into which so many of our loved ones have passed, we shall do well to concentrate our attention on these definite and inspired revelations. Our Lord's manifestations and words have been recorded for us by men who wrote under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit ; and we may rest upon their narratives with absolute confidence, not only that they are true, but that they contain the whole truth which God thought it essential that we should know. Fragmentary as they may seem from one point of view, they are not to be regarded as casual reminiscences. They are inspired records of the essential facts in these momentous events, and their very limitations will be found to have their instruction for us.

There are one or two points it may be well to observe before entering on them. The first is that it is evident they are not, and are not intended to be, a complete and detailed account of the Resurrection and its consequences. It may rather be said that they assume the Resurrection as a fact. They start from it, and tell us only what followed it. They are consequently, in the main, narratives of the communications and appearances of our Lord to His disciples after His Resurrection. The Resurrection itself was an extraordinary and miraculous event, which was witnessed by no

human eye, and we have no means of realising it except by the events which followed it. One consequence of this fact is that we cannot expect to be able to follow in exact detail the actual occurrences of the hours and days subsequent to the Resurrection. It is obvious that the narrators in the Gospels are not much concerned with them. They are absorbed in the supreme and momentous fact that the Lord had risen. That supreme reality overpowers everything in their minds, and they are only concerned to give an account of what the risen Lord said and did. This circumstance affords, it would seem, striking evidence of the reality and truth of their narratives. Persons who, like Thomas, were at all doubtful of the momentous fact of our Lord's Resurrection, might be concerned, as he was, with minute details and particular items of evidence ; but to those who had no doubt whatever of the fact, its greatness and its momentous consequences would be all in all. To see the risen Saviour Himself, to hear His words, and to worship Him, would be the one absorbing impulse in their minds.

One other observation, connected with this, may be of help to us in considering the narratives. In consequence of this absorption in the supreme reality of the Lord's presence, they are not concerned to mention details which are not of importance for appreciating it. How many women, for

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instance, were present at various scenes ; what was the particular order of their visits to the tomb ; the numbers even of the angels who spoke to them, are points which they are not careful to particularise. How could they ? The Angelic appearance itself, the momentous words spoken, the immense influence of the supreme fact suddenly brought home to them, could not but have the effect of obliterating for the time any secondary points in the occurrence. There are certainly no contradictions or inconsistencies in the various narratives ; but if there are details mentioned in one narrative which are not mentioned in another—if the narratives, in short, are slightly varied in detail without being inconsistent—this is just what it would be reasonable to expect in an account from various sources of such overwhelming occurrences. The inspired truth of the narrative does not involve the narration of the whole of the circumstances connected with it. It involves only the truth of the actual facts which are narrated, and their statement in due order and perspective.

If we approach the consideration of these narratives from this point of view, it will, I think, be found that they reflect in a remarkable degree the perplexity, the astonishment, even the bewilderment, of those momentous hours ; and as we read them, we seem almost to be transported into the very experience of the followers of our Lord,

of the women and of the Apostles. In two at least of the narratives—those of St. Mark and St. John—we are listening, as there is more and more reason to be assured, to two most important actors and eye-witnesses in the whole transaction ; for St. Mark's narrative is now generally admitted to be the record of the actual experiences and statements of St. Peter himself. This is at least the case to the end of the first eight verses of the last chapter of St. Mark. The verses from the ninth to the end of the chapter may be from a different source from the rest of the Gospel, and it is often said that they are not by St. Mark. For my part, I am much more inclined to think that they are the only part of the Gospel which is specially due to St. Mark. The whole of the Gospel up to that point is St. Peter's narration recorded by St. Mark, and when that narration ceased, St. Mark added a summary conclusion. But, at all events, when reading the first part of the last chapter of St. Mark, and when reading the concluding chapters of St. John, we are in actual touch with those two Apostles, and are hearing their own account of their experiences.

Now, approaching the narratives in this spirit, I would now only call your attention to the circumstances in which they commence the history. The body of our Lord had, on the evening of Friday, the day before the Sabbath, been laid by

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Joseph of Arimathæa in his own tomb, which he had hewn out of a rock. A great stone had been laid against the door of the tomb. The tomb would not be cut downwards, as a grave is with us, but horizontally, so as to be a sort of cave, and the stone which closed the entrance to it, though a great stone, was movable. In consequence, it was thought possible by the Jewish authorities that an attempt might be made by the disciples, or friends of our Lord, to remove the stone, enter the tomb, and carry away our Lord's body. They had accordingly asked Pilate to have the sepulchre watched until the third day was passed, in which our Lord had spoken of His rising from the dead, "lest haply His disciples come and steal Him away, and say unto the people, He is risen from the dead." Pilate accordingly gave them a guard, and they "went and made the sepulchre sure, sealing the stone, the guard being with them." By such means the sepulchre was secured against any human intrusion. A guard of Roman soldiers afforded an impregnable barrier against approach to it; and even if they could have been bribed or influenced to allow of any such approach, the broken seal would have shown that they had neglected their duty. We may be sure, therefore, that no human power could have entered the tomb on the third day.

Consider, in the next place, what was the state of mind of the disciples of Jesus. This is shown in

a conclusive manner by one circumstance in the conduct of the women. We read that the women who had come with Him out of Galilee followed His body after it was taken from the grave, "and beheld the tomb, and how His body was laid; and they returned and prepared spices and ointments." Similarly, St. Mark relates that "Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of James beheld where He was laid," and "when the Sabbath was past, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome, bought spices that they might come and anoint Him." Now this shows that they had no doubt whatever that they would find His body in the tomb, and moreover that it would remain there. They bought those spices and ointments in order to anoint His body, and they consequently regarded Him as finally laid in the tomb. At all events, they could not have dreamed of an immediate removal from it. It may be asked how they could entertain such a supposition in the face of our Lord's prediction that He would rise from the dead the third day. That prediction must have been generally known, or the Chief Priests and Pharisees would not have heard of it. It may be that, even if they had taken that prediction to heart, they had no idea that the rising again would mean the actual resurrection of His body. It was with them, as is said elsewhere of the Apostles on one occasion, when our Lord made the prediction :

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"This saying was hidden from them; neither knew they the things that were spoken." It was, in fact, not merely incredible, but unintelligible to them. At all events, it is clear that they had no expectation whatever of the reappearance on the third day of the actual body which had been laid in the tomb.

We can hardly be wrong in believing that the Apostles themselves must have been in the same state of mind on this point. The women were closely associated with them, and if the Apostles had expected any such resurrection as actually occurred, the women would have shared that expectation. This is of great value in reference to the suggestions which have been made to the effect that the women and the Apostles saw only what they expected to see, and that our Lord's appearances were but visions, which were the product of their own imaginations. The simple fact of their having prepared spices and ointments, to anoint His body, is conclusive proof that no such thoughts had entered their minds. They were doubtless unaware of the guard which had been set around the tomb, and they hoped by some means to enter it, and to anoint the precious body of their Master. These are the circumstances in which the narrative opens, and we shall proceed to see how all human expectations, alike of friends and of enemies, were baffled by "the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God."

II

FIRST VISIT TO THE SEPULCHRE

" Now late on the Sabbath day, as it began to dawn toward the first day of the week, came Mary Magdalene and the other Mary to see the sepulchre. And behold, there was a great earthquake ; for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven, and came and rolled away the stone, and sat upon it. His appearance was as lightning, and his raiment white as snow : and for fear of him the watchers did quake, and became as dead men. And the angel answered and said unto the women, Fear not ye : for I know that ye seek Jesus, which hath been crucified. He is not here ; for He is risen, even as He said. Come, see the place where the Lord lay. And go quickly, and tell His disciples, He is risen from the dead ; and lo, He goeth before you into Galilee ; there shall ye see Him : lo, I have told you."—
ST. MATTHEW xxviii. 1-7.

II

FIRST VISIT TO THE SEPULCHRE

IN considering in detail the narratives of our Lord's appearances after His Resurrection, let us start from the main facts which are beyond question. Of these, the first and most significant is that in the morning of the first day of the week after the Sabbath, the sepulchre of our Lord was entered by several women. All the narratives are in agreement on this point. St. Matthew says that the Angel who spoke to Mary Magdalene and the other Mary, when they came to see the sepulchre, bade them "Come, and see the place where the Lord lay." St. Mark tells us that Mary Magdalene and Mary the Mother of James, entered into the tomb and saw an Angel, like a young man, sitting on the right side. St. Luke says that Mary Magdalene and Joanna, and Mary the Mother of James, and other women with them, entered in and found not the body of the Lord Jesus, and were addressed by two men in dazzling raiment. St. John says that Mary Magdalene came early, while it was yet dark, into the tomb, and saw the stone taken away from

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the tomb, and then ran to Peter to say that the Lord's body had been taken out of it. Remembering what was recalled to you in the last address, it must be realised that this was in itself a most striking fact. The guard of Roman soldiers, the strongest and staunchest guard in the world at that day, had been placed the night before in charge of the tomb especially to prevent approach to it ; the stone in front of the tomb had been sealed, and they were charged to see that that seal was not broken. Yet, when a small company of women came in the early morning of the very next day, they found the stone moved away ; and they had no difficulty whatever in entering the tomb and observing it sufficiently to be assured that the body of the Lord was no longer there. It is evident from this mere fact, which, as I say, is unquestioned, that something momentous had happened to remove the obstacles of the guard and the heavy stone. What was it ?

St. Matthew alone gives the explanation to us, and it is characteristic of that disregard of details in comparison with the main fact, which we noticed already, that no other of the Evangelists should have thought it worth while to give an explanation of so remarkable a fact as the removal of all barriers from the tomb. There had occurred, he tells us, a great earthquake, " for the angel of the Lord descended from Heaven, and came and rolled away

the stone, and sat upon it. His appearance was as lightning, and his raiment white as snow: and for fear of him the keepers did quake, and became as dead men.” By that supernatural intervention God completely confounded the devices by which the Jewish authorities, with the assistance of Pilate, had hoped to obviate any interference with the tomb. It would seem evident that there was no other means than some intervention of this kind by which the tomb could have been thrown open to observation; and this consideration is of great importance in connection with the appearance of “Angels” in this narrative. Attempts have been made—even by critics who believe in the Resurrection—to relieve the narrative of some of the difficulties (as they consider) of this supernatural element; but it would seem evident that the whole story would have been incredible without some such interference with the natural course of events, and without some authoritative statement such as that which the Angel was able to give. Suppose there had been simply an earthquake which had been sufficient to remove the stone, and even to paralyse the guard. When the women approached the tomb, and found it empty, they would have been utterly bewildered, and would not have known either what had happened or what to do. But the appearance of the Angel at once paralysed the guard, explained to the women what

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had happened, and so enabled them to communicate at once with the Apostles.

It is indeed important to realise that angelic appearances in the Gospels, as in the rest of the Scriptures, are rare ; and whenever they occur we can always discern an adequate reason for them. Their appearance, for instance, in connection with our Lord's birth was essential if the mysterious and sacred fact was to be believed, and was to have its due effect. Neither to Mary, nor to Joseph, would the birth of our Lord have been comprehensible, unless its cause and its purpose had been revealed to them by Divine manifestations, conveyed to them by the Angels who visited them. So again, at our Lord's Ascension, the meaning of His departure, even with circumstances of glory, would not have been apparent to the disciples unless an Angel had appeared to tell them its meaning, and to direct their thoughts and their belief in consequence of it. The words, " This same Jesus which is so taken up from you into Heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen Him go into Heaven," were an indispensable supplement to the mere fact of our Lord's having passed away from earth in their sight. So here, the disappearance of our Lord's body would have been inexplicable, unless some Divinely commissioned authority had given an assurance of its meaning. It may be suggested that our Lord could Himself have appeared and

given these instructions ; but it was part of His deliberate determination that He should not appear fully at first, but that there should be a great reserve in His manifestations ; and in the absence of an immediate appearance by Himself, the Divine will could only be communicated by some supernatural messenger. The appearance of that messenger answered every purpose that was required in the circumstances. It broke down the obstacle of the guard ; it threw open the tomb to complete inspection, and it gave adequate reassurance and guidance to the women and the Apostles. The supernatural and the natural circumstances of the case thus hang completely together, and the whole course of the incident becomes simple and intelligible.

But the paralysis of the guard had another immediate effect. If they had been killed by an earthquake, their testimony to what occurred would have been annihilated ; but as they were only thrown into temporary helplessness, they were able, as St. Matthew immediately afterwards relates, to go back to the city, and to tell the Chief Priests what had come to pass. The story of that transaction affords, perhaps, the most fatal evidence of the malignant blindness and obstinacy of the Chief Priests. If there had been the least desire in their minds to know the truth, they would at once have realised that their action was opposed

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by supernatural power, and would have considered what so extraordinary an occurrence signified. But, instead of that, they close their eyes at once to the evidence thus afforded, and endeavour to crush it by the most preposterous of inventions. They bribed the soldiers, with "large money," to say that our Lord's disciples came by night and stole Him away while they slept. The immediate execution of the guards from whom Peter was delivered—as narrated in the Acts of the Apostles—shows what would have been the natural consequence to Roman soldiers of such a confession; but the Priests counted on inducing Pilate to connive with them in such an extravagant deception. The Jewish authorities, generally, were no doubt ready to co-operate with their leaders in anything which would obscure the fact of our Lord's Resurrection; and so, as St. Matthew tells us, this story became current among the Jews, and continued to be repeated even to the time when he was writing, perhaps some thirty years after the event.

One other consideration must be borne in mind respecting this supernatural intervention to open the tomb. It is not to be supposed that these interferences with the natural order were requisite for the Resurrection of our Lord. The removal of the stone from before the tomb was not required for the purpose of His departure from it; the earthquake and the Angelic appearance were simply

concurrent events, of importance only for the purpose of the due apprehension of His Resurrection. They were for the sake of their influence upon His disciples, both women and men, and they were, perhaps, the appropriate accompaniments of so supreme and Divine an event. But the Resurrection itself was not dependent on them. It is quite apparent from what was seen in the tomb that our Lord had, as it were, escaped from the conditions of carnal life, and that His body had become of a spiritual nature, superior to all the material circumstances of mortal flesh. He had left behind Him the very grave-clothes in which His body had been wrapped, and must have passed like a disembodied spirit into a spiritual world.

The condition of the grave-clothes is one of the most remarkable and significant circumstances, and it is recorded by St. John, who was an eye-witness of it. St. John's narrative, in his twentieth chapter, says that St. Peter and he ran together to the tomb after they had heard the message of the women ; and "the other disciple" (St. John himself) outran Peter, and came first to the tomb ; and, "stooping and looking in, he seeth the linen clothes lying, yet entered he not in ; Simon Peter therefore also cometh, following him, and entered into the tomb, and he beholdeth the linen clothes lying, and the napkin, that was about His head, not lying with the linen clothes, but rolled up

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in a place by itself." Some recent investigations have thrown a very striking and interesting light upon this observation. It was pointed out by Mr. Beard that this shows that, when Jesus rose from the dead, He withdrew from His grave-clothes without disturbing their arrangement. "On His retiring from them, the linen clothes fell flat on the rock because their support was withdrawn, and because they were borne down by the 100 lbs. weight of aloes and myrrh" which Joseph of Arimathæa had placed on them. "But there was no such weight pressing upon the napkin. Its smaller size, or the nature of its material, or its three-days' wrapping, or all these together, apparently enabled it to retain its erect form after the support which had moulded it was withdrawn." This was illustrated to Mr. Latham by a scene which he witnessed of a burial in the East at the present day. In funeral processions, as observed by him, the corpse was carried on a bier borne on men's shoulders ; it lay face upward. "The fashion of the grave-clothes was varied, but one particular was in all cases alike. The face, the neck, and the upper surface of the shoulder were in every instance quite bare, so that between the grave-clothes and the cloth which enveloped the crown of the head, and which was a foot off or more, the body was wholly uncovered." It was at once evident to Mr. Beard how it was that the napkin in our Lord's

tomb came to be in a place by itself, apart from the rest of the clothes. “ If this body that I see on the bier were quietly to exhale into space, we should have the grave-clothes lying flat on the bier, and that kerchief which is now twisted round the head would be left by itself, a foot or more away from the body. The very sight would be witnessed which we are told was witnessed at the Lord’s tomb.” Customs, as this writer says, in the East are slow to change, and burial customs everywhere are the most persistent of all ; and we are not likely to be wrong in supposing that our Lord’s grave-clothes were of this character. This consideration gives such reality to the scene, that we feel sure the Evangelist saw it with his own eyes (see note on p. 23).

But if our Lord left the wrappings of His mortal frame like this, we can realise that the act of Resurrection must have been of the same purely spiritual nature as is implied in some of His other appearances. He appeared wherever He would, indifferently to all physical obstacles. He appears to His disciples, for instance, when the doors are shut ; and He is clearly superior to all ordinary physical embarrassments. The nature of His body in this condition is quite beyond our comprehension. “ There is,” says St. Paul, “ a natural body, and there is a spiritual body ” ; and that is all we know. Our Lord’s spiritual body retains the external characteristics of the natural one. The wounds

of the Crucifixion were still there. His form and features were recognisable ; and yet He was visible or invisible as He pleased, and appeared wherever He pleased. These are the facts which are proved by the open tomb, and by our Lord's subsequent appearances ; and they reveal conditions of life in the spiritual world which are beyond our present comprehension. But it should be observed that they enable us to comprehend some other similar manifestations which are recorded in the Bible, such as the subsequent appearances of our Lord to St. Paul, and some of the Divine manifestations recorded in the Old Testament. They show that there is a possibility of the manifestation of spiritual beings to mortal eyes, and of the utterance by spiritual lips to mortal ears of Divine messages, warnings, and revelations. They prove that, even in our ordinary life, we may be encompassed by "an innumerable company of Angels and the spirits of just men made perfect." Such manifestations occur, indeed, like the appearances of Angels, only on great and solemn occasions, for the accomplishment of some great purpose. They are never trivial visions or utterances. They prove to us that we have a spiritual world all around us, but a world which is concerned, not with material or fleshly concerns, but with the great realities of righteousness and eternal life. For any communications for less purposes than these we have no warrant in Scripture.

But we may be confirmed by these narratives in the assurance that we live daily in the presence of our Lord, and of His Angels, and the sense of that Presence cannot fail to deepen and solemnise our daily thoughts and hopes.

N.B.—The quotations on p. 20 are from a valuable work by the Rev. Henry Latham, Master of Trinity Hall, Cambridge, entitled “*The Risen Master*,” pp. 4, 5.

III

FIRST WORDS TO THE WOMEN

" But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they came unto the tomb, bringing the spices which they had prepared. And they found the stone rolled away from the tomb. And they entered in, and found not the body of the Lord Jesus. And it came to pass, while they were perplexed thereabout, behold, two men stood by them in dazzling apparel: and as they were affrighted, and bowed down their faces to the earth, they said unto them, Why seek ye the living among the dead ? He is not here, but is risen : remember how He spake unto you when He was yet in Galilee, saying that the Son of man must be delivered up into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and the third day rise again. And they remembered His words, and returned from the tomb, and told all these things to the eleven, and to all the rest. Now they were Mary Magdalene, and Joanna, and Mary the *mother* of James : and the other women with them told these things unto the apostles."—ST. LUKE xxiv. 1-10.

III

FIRST WORDS TO THE WOMEN

AFTER considering, in the two previous Addresses, the external circumstances of our Lord's Resurrection, let us proceed to the personal features of it, or to the nature and effect of our Lord's manifestations to His followers and Apostles. It would appear, from St. Matthew and St. Mark, that when Mary Magdalene and the other Mary approached the sepulchre they were alarmed by the marks they saw of the great convulsion which had occurred ; but they nevertheless entered the tomb, and were amazed to find an Angel in a white robe sitting on the right side. This Angel at once said unto them (according to St. Mark), “ Be not amazed. Ye seek Jesus, the Nazarene, which hath been crucified : He is risen ; He is not here : behold the place where they laid Him ! ” St. Matthew makes the words rather more emphatic : “ Fear not *ye*, ” said the Angel ; as much as to say, There are those who might have cause for fear, like the guards, but you have no occasion for it, “ for I know that ye seek Jesus, which hath been crucified ”—as though

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he said, You are His friends, and need fear no harm in seeking Him. We can well understand how such an assurance must have been needed. To find themselves in the tomb in which they had seen our Lord's body laid, and not to see it there, must have been an overwhelming shock to them, and they might well have feared that they were in the presence of some hostile power. That was the first thought of Mary Magdalene, as narrated afterwards. "They have taken away my Lord out of the sepulchre, and we know not where they have laid Him." But the Angel takes them, as it were, by the hand, and bids them come and see the place where the Lord lay, and hastens to explain, "He is not here ; for He is risen, even as He said."

Those few words were sufficient to assure them that no harm had happened to their Master's body. But, as already observed, what utter distress and confusion must have overtaken them, if it had not been mercifully provided that an Angel should be present to give them this assurance ! They could not but remember, even at that moment, that our Lord had told them, more than once, that He would be crucified, and that on the third day He would rise again from the dead. But, like the Apostles, they "understood not the things that were spoken." It may seem to us very surprising that these words should not have been understood and cherished ; and that the women should have

come down to the sepulchre without any thought in their minds that our Lord's prediction would have been fulfilled. But it must be remembered, as suggested already, that the words could not possibly have been so intelligible to them as they are to us. We have learned by the actual occurrence what the words meant, but nothing like such a rising from the dead as that of our Lord had ever been experienced before. It is true Lazarus had been raised from the grave by our Lord's power ; but the miracle had been effected by our Lord's authority, and it might have seemed only a stronger exertion of the power He had shown of healing the sick from deadly illness. But that an individual who had been violently put to death should, of his own initiative and power, resume his life and leave the grave, was a thing which it had never entered into the mind of man to conceive. Even when it had occurred, it was with great difficulty that it was realised and believed by those who were first informed of it. Our Lord's prediction of it was, in fact, like other prophecies in the Bible, only to be understood when the event had actually occurred. It is the same, indeed, with the predictions of St. Paul respecting our own future resurrection and life. As he says, he shows us "a mystery" ; and when our Lord spoke to His followers of His rising again, it was to them a mystery.

But when the women were reminded by the Angel of His prediction, some apprehension of His meaning must have come home to them, and they would begin to be assured. St. Luke says, "they remembered His words," how He had told them "that the Son of man must be delivered up into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and the third day rise again." The first part of that startling prediction—so startling as to seem at first incredible—had been terribly realised, and they would now begin to recognise that they were experiencing the final part of it. St. Luke adds one very impressive element in the Angel's message, "Why seek ye," he began by saying, "the living among the dead ?" There could not but be something profoundly suggestive in those words. Our Lord says of Himself, when He appeared to St. John in the Book of Revelation, "I am He that liveth." That is His essential title. As He said also to Martha and Mary, "I am the Resurrection and the Life." The Angel suggests to them, by that question, that the Lord whom they were seeking could not be among the dead. He reminds them that He is not only "the Lord of Life and Death and of all things to them pertaining," but that He is the very Life Himself—He that liveth ; the Eternal Living One—and that consequently they ought to be looking for His appearance elsewhere than among the tombs of the dead. It was

a question and a suggestion fitted to raise their thoughts and hearts at once above the tomb and its associations, and to lead them to look for some living manifestations of their Lord.

The Angel proceeds to recall their minds to our Lord's assurances by bidding them go quickly and tell His disciples and Peter, "He goeth before you into Galilee : there shall ye see Him, as He said unto you." This assures them that there would be no breach between their former experiences and the new life on which they were entering. In Galilee they had first known our Lord ; some of them were Galilæan women. There they had heard the gracious words which had attached them to Him, and now He bade them return to the scene of those sacred associations, and resume the intercourse which was so precious to them. It is marvellous how much consolation, gentle admonition and encouragement, is concentrated in these words of the Angel. Like all angelic words recorded in the Scriptures, they go straight to the very heart of the matter, and bring before the mind, in one concentrated saying, all that is essential for illumination and instruction. Their thoughts were at once raised from the dead to the living, they were brought back into communion with the Saviour's words and promises, and they were pointed forward to a future hope.

One word which was recorded only by St. Mark

must not escape our notice. "Go," he said, "tell His disciples and Peter that He goeth before you into Galilee"—"and Peter." It is natural and touching that it should be St. Mark who records that word ; for he, you are aware, was the secretary of St. Peter, and it is St. Peter's narrative that he records. Well might those words be a precious remembrance to St. Peter. Only three days before, St. Peter had denied his Lord, denied Him with passion and with oaths ; and now His Angel singles out Peter as the Apostle to whom the news of His Resurrection should be first more especially brought. Such a remembrance of him by his Lord must have had a double meaning to Peter. It could not but be felt as a tacit rebuke ; as much as to say, this message is sent to you from the Lord whom you denied a few hours ago. You thought that He was about to be destroyed, and that you yourself were in danger with Him ; but "I am He that liveth and was dead, and behold, I am alive for evermore." All that must surely have rushed into Peter's mind. Yet at the same time he must have felt that it was the beginning of an absolution. The Master whom he had denied, by sending him this meassge, recalled him to his allegiance and extended a new hope to him.

The remembrance, however, of this action of St. Peter may cast some light upon the striking

fact that our Lord's first appearances and assurances were vouchsafed to the faithful women. All the Apostles had forsaken Him, and fled on the evening of His apprehension. According to our Lord's prediction, they were scattered to their own and left Him alone, and if He was not alone it was only because His Father was with Him. But the women had at least been faithful to Him throughout. Some of them had stood at His Cross, some had followed Him to His burial, and seen where His body was laid, and they had come, as soon as the end of the Sabbath permitted them, to anoint and honour His body. They had not been privileged to hear those profoundly impressive discourses in which our Lord consoled and encouraged His Apostles, on the evening before His Passion ; but their attachment and devotion to Him was nevertheless so great, that they had followed Him even to the grave. Was it not fitting, and congruous to the contrast thus exhibited between the conduct of the women and the Apostles, that our Lord's first messages of grace should have been vouchsafed to the women ?

Perhaps, moreover, it was not only because they had better deserved such grace, but because it was in their devoted hearts that belief in our Lord's Resurrection could first take root. We are told that they obeyed the Angel's injunction, and returned from the tomb, and told all these things

to the Eleven and to all the rest ; but " their words seemed to them as idle tales, and they believed them not." It was their persistence, and particularly that of Mary Magdalene, which at length induced Peter, to whom the special message had been sent, and John the beloved disciple, to visit the tomb and see for themselves what had come to pass. We may be thankful that to this day women continually play this part. They cling to truths and realities which men disregard in the heat and passion of life, and the faith of the world finds thus a perpetual anchor in their hearts. This is peculiarly the case with the Christian Faith ; for this is, before all things, faith and devotion towards a Person ; and it is the peculiar privilege and glory of women to cling to our Saviour now, with a personal devotion such as was shown at the Resurrection by the women from Galilee. It is the function of men, when that faith has been roused, to strengthen and protect it with all the forces of intellect and action ; but in the order and the influence by which faith is created and sustained, there has been throughout history a repetition of the experiences of the time of the Resurrection. Devotion to the Person of Christ is the central force of the Christian life, and it is to women in a special degree that the maintenance of that faith is due.

But the Lord's gracious recognition of this

devotion received more conspicuous expression. St. Matthew tells us that, as they went, Jesus met them. His first personal appearance was vouchsafed to them. The way He met them was peculiarly gracious. He said to them, "All hail"; that is the translation in both our versions, but unhappily it is a very inadequate rendering of the Greek word. It is rather, "Rejoice." It is a somewhat unusual form of greeting among the Jews, whose usual address is, "Peace be with you." It implies, "All be well with you." It is essentially a word of assurance and encouragement; it is the very word which their hearts would naturally have longed to hear from the lips of their Lord at that moment; it implies that, as of old, He brought blessing and grace to them. It is like an echo of that infinitely blessed assurance with which His last discourses to His disciples opened: "Let not your hearts be troubled. Ye believe in God, believe also in Me."

It will be evident how this assurance, and this word of cheer, completes the revelation which had been made by the Angel at the empty tomb. Without it, the women would have gone to the Eleven and the other disciples with the good news indeed, but much perplexed. St. Mark's account of the spirit in which they left the tomb, is, we can well realise, none too strong. "They went out and fled from the tomb; for trembling and astonishment

had come upon them, and they said nothing to any one"—nothing, that is, to any whom they met on the way ; " for they were afraid." The vision had been too much for them ; and, though they believed the Angel, and obeyed him by going back to the Eleven, and though, as St. Matthew says, they were moved with great joy, yet their joy was necessarily mingled with fear. They departed from the tomb, he says, " with fear and great joy"—no unusual combination in human experience—and ran to bring His disciples word. But when the Lord met them, and addressed them with that gracious greeting, the fear was dispelled and the joy alone remained. They came and took hold of His feet and worshipped Him. And Jesus said unto them, " Fear not." Could anything be more complete and comforting than the assurance thus given them ?

But our Lord had a further word for them. " Fear not," He said : " go tell My brethren that they depart into Galilee, and there shall they see Me." It was the same charge which had been given them by the Angel, but what an infinite grace is added to it by the terms in which it is expressed ! " Go and tell My brethren"—the Eleven, who had deserted Him, and who were now given up to doubt and fear, were " His brethren." Our Lord had said before that, " Whosoever shall do the will of My Father in Heaven, the same is

My brother and sister and mother." But that those who, in the greatest crisis of His life, had failed to do the will of God, and had failed to maintain their faith in Him, that these were still His brethren ; this was surely the most gracious word which He could possibly have uttered. Single words from the mouth of our Lord convey an infinity of meaning—far more than many sentences of other men ; and that one word "brethren" proclaimed forgiveness and reunion to His saddened disciples. Their feelings must have corresponded to those lines of Keble :

" Thou know'st our bitterness—our joys are Thine ;
No stranger Thou to all our wanderings wild ;
Nor could we bear to think, how every line
Of us, Thy darkened likeness and defiled,

" Stands in full sunshine of Thy piercing eye,
But that Thou call'st us Brethren : sweet repose
Is in that word ! the Lord Who dwells on high
Knows all, yet loves us better than He knows."

Let us not doubt that we may take that assurance to heart, and be confident that He feels towards us, if we will allow Him, as, in some sense at least, His brethren.

IV

MEETING WITH MARY
MAGDALENE

" Now on the first *day* of the week cometh Mary Magdalene early, while it was yet dark, unto the tomb, and seeth the stone taken away from the tomb. She runneth therefore, and cometh to Simon Peter, and to the other disciple, whom Jesus loved, and saith unto them, They have taken away the Lord out of the tomb, and we know not where they have laid Him. Peter therefore went forth, and the other disciple, and they went toward the tomb. And they ran both together : and the other disciple outran Peter, and came first to the tomb ; and stooping and looking in, he seeth the linen cloths lying ; yet entered he not in. Simon Peter therefore also cometh, following him, and entered into the tomb ; and he beholdeth the linen cloths lying, and the napkin, that was upon His head, not lying with the linen cloths, but rolled up in a place by itself. Then entered in therefore the other disciple also, which came first to the tomb, and he saw, and believed. For as yet they knew not the scripture, that He must rise again from the dead. So the disciples went away again unto their own home.

" But Mary was standing without at the tomb weeping : so, as she wept, she stooped and looked into the tomb ; and she beholdeth two angels in white sitting, one at the head, and one at the feet, where the body of Jesus had lain. And they say unto her, Woman, why weepest thou ? She saith unto them, Because they have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid Him. When she had thus said, she turned herself back, and beholdeth Jesus standing, and knew not that it was Jesus. Jesus saith unto her, Woman, why weepest thou ? whom seekest thou ? She, supposing Him to be the gardener, saith unto Him, Sir, if Thou hast borne Him hence, tell me where Thou hast laid Him, and I will take Him away. Jesus saith unto her, Mary. She turneth herself, and saith unto Him in Hebrew, Rabboni ; which is to say, Master. Jesus saith to her, Touch Me not ; for I am not yet ascended unto the Father : but go unto My brethren, and say to them, I ascend unto My Father and your Father, and My God and your God. Mary Magdalene cometh and telleth the disciples, I have seen the Lord ; and *how that* He had said these things unto her."—ST. JOHN xx. 1-18.

IV

MEETING WITH MARY MAGDALENE

WE have considered the narratives in St. Matthew, St. Mark, and St. Luke, of what passed in the morning of the Resurrection, and we now pass to the narrative of St. John. He records an incident distinct from the others, viz. our Lord's interview with Mary Magdalene. Before entering upon it, it may be well to dismiss one strange and unfortunate mistake, which has prevailed too widely respecting her. In a good deal of Christian tradition she has been identified with the woman in the city who was a sinner, who brought an alabaster box of ointment and anointed the feet of our Lord, as recorded in the seventh chapter of St. Luke. At the commencement of the eighth chapter she is mentioned as one of certain women who had been healed of evil spirits and infirmities, as "Mary, called Magdalene, from whom seven devils had gone out": but there is no connection whatever between the two scenes or the two women. After the feast at the Pharisee's house, at which the woman who was a sinner appeared, St. Luke says that our Lord

went about their cities and villages in Galilee, and He was accompanied by the Twelve, and by many women, of whom Mary Magdalene was one, who ministered to Him of their substance. She was called Magdalene, from one of the places in Palestine which bore the name Magdala, and our Lord had healed her of a demoniac possession, which, as we know from the Gospels, was a common malady of that day. That act of healing was doubtless the basis and the commencement of her grateful attachment to Him ; and the associations which have given the name “ Magdalen ” to a certain class of penitents are a complete misuse of her name. She was evidently, after her healing, one of the strongest characters among the women, as is shown by her attendance at the foot of the Cross, and by the prominence given to her among the women in this narrative.

She was, accordingly, among the women who came early to the sepulchre on the Sunday morning, and she seems to have acted somewhat independently of them. They went back to tell the disciples what they had seen after the injunction of the Angel ; but it would seem that Mary Magdalene did not wait to hear the Angel’s explanation, but when she saw that the stone had been rolled away, and that the body of our Lord was not in the tomb, she left the others behind and hastened away. As St. John says, “ She runneth and cometh

to Simon Peter and to the other disciple, whom Jesus loved, and saith unto them, They have taken away the Lord out of the tomb, and we know not where they have laid Him." By the word "we" she associates herself with the other women in her report of what had happened ; but she had evidently formed her own conclusion instantly, out of her intense anxiety and apprehension. It was not an unnatural conclusion, as our Lord's prediction of the Resurrection was not in the mind of any one, and it could only, as we have seen, have been obviated by the explanation of the Angel. On that information Peter and John hastened to the tomb, and they beheld the scene which we have already considered, and the grave-clothes of our Lord lying exactly where His body had lain, showing that He had simply withdrawn His body from them by a spiritual transformation. I need only remind you that, as in other incidents in this passage, the personal characteristics of the two Apostles are strikingly exhibited. St. John, in his loving devotion, outruns Peter ; and when he sees the linen clothes lying, he does not venture to enter in, but pauses and considers : but Peter, with a greater impetuosity of character, at once enters into the tomb. St. John then follows, and "he saw and believed." For as yet, says the Evangelist, "they knew not the scripture, that He must rise again from the dead." But that Scripture—the

word of the Lord—at once recurred to his mind, and he realised better than the women that the prophecy had been fulfilled. So those two disciples went away again unto their own home, content doubtless to know that the Saviour had risen, and to wait for His fuller manifestation. It is remarkable that it is not said that the two Apostles saw the Angels, and it would seem that the Angels did not reveal themselves to them.

That Mary did not return with the two disciples can only be attributed to the intensity of her sorrow and anxiety. They were satisfied, but she was not ; and she “ remained without at the sepulchre, weeping ” ; and at length, as she wept, she stooped and looked into the tomb, “ and she beheld two angels sitting, one at the head and the other at the feet, where the body of Jesus had lain.” But she does not appear to have concerned herself with them. The fact that the body of the Lord had disappeared, and that she knew not where it was, absorbs every other consideration and feeling in her mind. She treats them almost with disregard. They say to her, gently : “ Woman, why weepest thou ? ” and she replies, as she might have done to the question if it had been put to her by one of her own companions, and not by a supernatural being, with eager directness, “ Because they have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid Him.” She was evidently in no condition to

receive an explanation, and the Angels make no reply to her. But our Lord, in His new spiritual life, was aware of her trouble and had followed her ; and when she turned, evidently with some impatience, from the Angels, she saw Him standing behind her ; but still she is so overwhelmed with her sorrow, and perhaps blinded by her tears, that she does not recognise Him. " She knew not that it was Jesus." The fault was in her, not in any change in His appearance, for He had been at once recognised by the other women to whom He appeared, and was always recognised by the Apostles, except when He veiled Himself intentionally for a time, as in the walk to Emmaus. Nothing can illustrate the intensity of the mental anguish into which Mary had been thrown so much as that she did not recognise her beloved Master when He stood before her. He repeats the inquiry of the Angels, " Woman, why weepest thou ? " But He adds another question which would tell her at once that he realised the cause of her anguish. " Whom seekest thou ? " He said, and with the same passionate eagerness which marks her throughout, she assumes that He knows. She supposes Him to be the gardener, the man who had charge of the garden in which the tomb was situated, and thinks therefore that He must know what had happened in the place of which He had charge. " Sir," she says, " if thou have taken Him hence,

tell me where thou hast laid Him, and I will take Him away"—“I will take Him away.” What a strange revelation of the intensity of her passion! She alone to carry away the body of her Lord! Jesus then resorts to that influence which is of all the most effectual in mutual communications—the voice. He addresses to her the one word, “Mary”—no more. How often must He have used that word in addressing her, in the old days of friendship in Galilee or elsewhere! Though now in spiritual form, He is evidently able to use the very tones to which she was accustomed, and she instantly realises to whom she had spoken. She turned herself—an indication that, in her eagerness and restlessness, she had turned somewhat away from Him as she was speaking to Him—and at once exclaims, “Rabboni!” that is, My Teacher, or, My Master.

It was the highest term of respect which a disciple could use to a teacher; but it seems very remarkable that it is in this particular capacity that she should recognise Him; and this may partly explain the striking incident which follows. She does not address Him as “Lord.” The tones of His voice had recalled the lessons of the great Teacher, as she had been wont to sit at His feet; and that, for the moment, is the dominant idea of Him in her mind. The immediate answer of our Lord is a surprising one. “Touch Me not,” He

says, “ for I am not yet ascended unto My Father.” What was it that occasioned His warning to touch Him not ? There are few words in the New Testament which have been the subject of more discussion. They have been treated, in more than one sermon, by one of the most learned and spiritual divines of our Church, Bishop Andrews. But the simplest explanation seems the best. There must have been something in Mary’s gesture which indicates that she was not approaching the Lord with sufficient reverence, that she was approaching Him, as I have just suggested, more as the Teacher with whom she had conversed of old, than as the Lord who had died and risen again in glory. He had not checked the other women when they had fallen at His feet and taken hold of Him in reverence, but Mary’s intense eagerness must have carried her somewhat further. She did not realise that He had entered, and was further entering, upon a higher state than He had borne when He had been her Teacher. I cannot do better than quote Bishop Andrews’s words : “ First, on her part she forgat herself a little in her touch, as in the term with which she addressed Him, who, though He were not yet ascended, was presently to ascend, and be taken up into Heaven, and would be touched in some better manner. Until she had learned so to touch, let her not touch. Secondly, on Christ’s part, she need not be so eager ; ‘ for I am not yet

ascended,' that is, though He were going, yet He had not gone. Some other time might serve her to touch Him in. Now He had matters of more haste to send her about, and would have no time taken from it, and so for saving of time, 'Touch Me not.' Thirdly, in the touch itself. He was not yet ascended, and to touch Him before He were so, was not the true touch, not the touch that would do her or His any good. For all these, or some of these reasons, no touching now."

It is a warning which perhaps we have too much reason to apply to ourselves. I cannot pass the incident without asking you to consider whether there is not a danger of some lack of reverence towards our Lord, exhibited in some of our religious and devotional language. I cannot but own I rather shrink from such language as that of the popular hymn, "Safe in the arms of Jesus, safe on His gentle Breast," or from such language as "Let me to Thy Bosom fly"—the Bosom which was reserved even on earth for the one beloved disciple. I have heard of a good man, who was on his death-bed, and a friend asked him, did he not feel safe in the arms of Jesus ? "No," he exclaimed, "at His feet." I will quote once more from the great Bishop I have mentioned. "I know not how," he says, "our behaviour in many of us is so loose ; covered we sit, sitting we pray, standing or walking, or as it takes us, we receive, as if Christ were so

gentle a person we might touch Him, do to Him what we list, He will take all well : He hath not the power to say *Noli* to anything : but He hath, we see, and saith it to one highly in His favour, and saith it, but for a touch, a little touch, otherwise than it should." "Christ," he further says, "will be approached in all dutiful and decent sort, and He will not have us offer Him any other. The best we have, I am sure, in the way of reverence, is not too good for Christ. It is better to render account to Him of a little too much than of a great deal too little." I am sure we should do well to take such thoughts to heart.

But this leads us to the main portion of the Saviour's message through Mary Magdalene. The lesson she had thus learned she was to carry to the disciples, and so to tell them, through her own experience, not only that the Saviour had risen and had been seen of her, but that He was not to return to them in the former familiarity. He was to ascend to Heaven, to resume His eternal glory with the Father, and was to be approached by them in that character ; "Go unto My brethren," He says, "and say unto them, I ascend unto My Father and your Father, and to My God and your God." It is the same gracious message to "brethren" that He had used before, but the nature of His brotherhood is explained more particularly. He does not say, "I ascend unto our

Father," as though they had been on an equality with Him. "I ascend," He says, "unto My Father, who is also your Father, and to My God who is also your God." Our Saviour had made them brethren. He, by His sacrifice on the Cross, had obtained for them access to the family of God. He anticipates St. Paul's declaration : "As many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God, for we have not received a spirit of bondage again to fear, but we have received the spirit of adoption whereby we cry, 'Abba, Father.'" It is easy, and it is common, to speak of God being our Father, in a general sense ; but to be the Son of God in a similar sense to that in which Christ is, means something vastly more, and this it is which our Lord here promises to His disciples, and offers to us.

Is it not wonderful how much has been revealed in the course of these few hours, and these few personal incidents ? The whole position of our Lord after His Resurrection is made clear, the spiritualising of His body, so that He could be present wherever He would, and can now be present wherever He will ; His ascent from this earth to the right hand of God ; at the same time, His continued sympathy with His disciples, His care for them, His forgiveness of them, His assurance that they are admitted to the fellowship of brethren with Him, and His claim to the deepest

reverence, submission, love and trust. This is the illumination which these few verses throw upon our state. God grant that we may so live here as to be permitted hereafter to follow Him, and to ascend, when our time shall come, to His Father and our Father, to His God and our God.

V

THE WITNESS OF THE GUARD

" Now while they were going, behold, some of the guard came into the city, and told unto the chief priests all the things that were come to pass. And when they were assembled with the elders, and had taken counsel, they gave large money unto the soldiers, saying, Say ye, His disciples came by night, and stole Him away while we slept. And if this come to the governor's ears, we will persuade him, and rid you of care. So they took the money, and did as they were taught: and this saying was spread abroad among the Jews, *and continueth* until this day."—ST. MATTHEW xxviii. 11-15.

V

THE WITNESS OF THE GUARD

THIS important incident, respecting the guard of the soldiers, which had been granted by Pilate to the Chief Priests to watch our Lord's tomb, and their communication to those who had sent them, is recorded only by St. Matthew ; and the reason for its being mentioned only by him deserves our special notice. There is a sort of criticism prevalent which tends to discredit narratives which have only the support of one Evangelist, and which uses the almost "cant" phrase, that this or that Evangelist "knows nothing" of such an incident. From the Christian point of view, and from that of the whole Church till very recent times, criticisms of that nature are out of court ; for it has been the belief of the Church that the narratives of the Gospels are inspired, and consequently that a statement made by one of them has as much claim to belief as if it were made by all four. How far that inspiration extends, whether it preserved the Evangelists from the least inaccuracy in the details of their narratives, is a proper question for discussion. It certainly has allowed some variation in points of detail, as, for

instance, in the order of our Lord's temptations, which is given differently by St. Matthew and St. Luke. The temptations are the same, but the second and the third are given in a different order. This can only mean that the order in which the temptations occurred was not a vital matter, and that the substance of the occurrence alone was of consequence. But the most striking example of this liberty is afforded by the account of the Institution of the Lord's Supper, in which, though all the accounts are perfectly harmonious, there are slight variations in the narratives. It is difficult not to conclude that the permission of these minor variations is itself an inspired feature ; as though the Holy Spirit would not have us rest too much upon mere literalism and verbal details, and would compel us to fix our minds on the main substance of the narratives. It would seem in fact that, subject to the general superintendence of Inspiration, the writers were left to the free play of their own motives and purposes.

In this case, the reason why St. Matthew alone mentions this incident, relating to the watch over the grave, seems very evident. His Gospel was written with a special view to Jews, as is illustrated by his frequent references to prophecy. It was in the fulfilment of prophecy that the chief evidence of our Lord's claims was sought by the Jews, and St. Matthew, therefore, is eager to point out, at

every turn, how our Lord's life echoes the predictions of prophecy. So in the present case. St. Matthew from first to last brings into prominence our Lord's relations with the Scribes and Pharisees, with the rulers of His people. It is St. Matthew who gives the great discourse in which our Lord finally denounced them. The other Evangelists are not so specially concerned with this aspect of our Lord's life, and with this aspect of His Resurrection. But it was imperative for St. Matthew's purpose that he should record the reception which the fact of our Lord's Resurrection had with the Jewish rulers. It is with a view to this, that he alone recorded the supernatural circumstances of the Resurrection. It is he who tells us that "there was a great earthquake; for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven, and came and rolled away the stone, and sat upon it. His appearance was like lightning, and his raiment white as snow: and for fear of him the keepers did shake, and became as dead men." The miraculous appearance was only seen by the soldiers who formed the watch, and by them it must have been reported. It must be by a confession of their own that we learn that the keepers did quake and became as dead men. Having recorded the experiences of the soldiers to this extent, it was imperative that St. Matthew should inform us of their subsequent action, and of its effect upon those who sent them.

Now, the women appear to have arrived after the earthquake, and it is remarkable that they do not seem to have had any communication with the soldiers of the watch. They and the Apostles enter the tomb and hold communication with the Angels without being for a moment interfered with by the soldiers. It is evident, therefore, that the soldiers must have left immediately after the earthquake and the apparition of the Angel. They evidently abandoned their post after that terrifying experience, and we do not know what they all did. But some of them, St. Matthew says, probably a select number of them, resolved to report to those who had sent them. While the women to whom our Saviour had appeared were going as He had bidden them, with His message to His brethren, as He graciously called them, "some of the guard came into the city and told unto the Chief Priests all the things that were done." "They told unto them all the things that were come to pass." If so, they told the Chief Priests of the earthquake, of the appearance of an Angel in dazzling glory; of his having rolled back the stone from the mouth of the sepulchre; and of their paralysis in his presence. That paralysis seems to have prevented their learning anything of what followed in the visit of the women and of Peter and John. They were evidently struck with consternation, and withdrew from a scene which had been marked by such terrifying manifestations.

It is to be observed that they report, not to their military superiors, but to the Chief Priests. This is very remarkable in explanation of the subsequent action of the Chief Priests. The watch had been granted them by Pilate, with the contemptuous phrase, "Ye have a watch," or rather, perhaps, "Take a guard: go your way, make it as sure as you can": almost as though he himself believed that their fear of our Lord's rising again the third day would be realised, and that their watch would be ineffectual. He, however, had given this watch to them and placed it at their disposal, and they, consequently, were its superiors for the time being. The soldiers therefore reported only to the Chief Priests; but they cannot have failed to tell them of the marvellous occurrences they had seen, particularly the awful appearance of the Angel, which were their sole justification for having left their post; and we may be sure they made their employers understand what a terrible experience it had been. If this be so, we have this remarkable state of things. The Chief Priests, on the day of the Resurrection, were the only persons who were informed of that amazing circumstance. The women and the disciples had seen, indeed, the Angels who had become the guardians of the tomb; but they had not seen the glorious, divine interposition of the Angel who rolled back the

stone from the door, and they had not experienced the earthquake. It was the Chief Priests alone who knew all that impressive and overpowering manifestation. They learned it, moreover, from the most unimpeachable witnesses. The information was not brought to them by any Jews or disciples of our Lord, who might have been supposed to be prejudiced by their beliefs or interests. It was brought to them by Roman soldiers, who had no concern, or only a contemptuous one, in the religious struggle which was connected with our Lord's crucifixion. They were perfectly neutral witnesses, entrusted with the simple soldiers' duty to act as sentinels over a sepulchre ; nor was it only one or two witnesses, it was "some of the watch" who came into the city, and brought the news, on behalf, of course, of all the rest.

Now consider what this position involved. The Chief Priests had acted in the apprehension that some attempt would be made by our Lord's disciples to provide by deception some verification of His declaration that on the third day He would rise again. They would not believe that there could be any truth in that prophecy of His, and they thought there was nothing to be guarded against but a conspiracy of His disciples. But now they had evidence before their eyes that a miraculous interposition had been vouchsafed, to fulfil our Lord's prophecy and promise. They now learned,

for a certainty, how a great Angel had rolled back the stone from the door of the tomb, and that consequently it was open ; and though they knew not what had become of our Lord's body, they knew for certain that a divine interposition had occurred to release Him from the grave. That they alone for the present knew, and it confronted them with a great challenge. These men, who had conspired against our Lord and killed Him, had it now brought plainly to their minds that they had been fighting against God ; that God Himself had interfered by His Angel to vindicate our Lord's claims, and that consequently their whole conspiracy against Him was against One who was under God's special protection. He had not saved Himself from the Cross, but God had interfered to save Him from the grave. That fact alone was the most complete condemnation of their conduct. The soldiers whom they had appointed to protect their action had supplied the most conclusive condemnation of it. What would they do ? This was the crucial and final test of their character. It might almost seem as if our Lord, in His mercy, by this appearance of the great Angel had given them one last place for repentance. It was open to them at that moment to recognise their sin ; it was open to them to acknowledge that the hand of God Himself had interposed to convince them that they had been fighting against Him ; frankly to

confess their fault and throw themselves at the feet of the risen Saviour.

But it proved that their hearts were hardened and they could not repent. It would of course have involved, not only a confession of their sin and malice, but an abandonment of their authority, and a submission of their will and thoughts in all things to the Son of God whom they had rejected and put to death. But that was too much for them. They could not humiliate themselves to that extent before their people: they could not relinquish their power, and so they found themselves obliged, according to that terrible verse of the Psalms, "to fall from one wickedness to another," and to bind themselves still more firmly in the depths of their iniquity, by covering over, by means of a flagrant lie, the Divine evidence that had been brought to them. When they were assembled with the elders and had taken counsel—it was an act committed with full deliberation—"they gave large money unto the soldiers, saying, Say ye, His disciples came by night, and stole Him away while we slept. And if this come to the Governor's ears, we will persuade him, and rid you of care." It was a palpable falsehood, for if they were asleep, how did they know that the disciples came while they slept? That Roman soldiers should sleep on guard was a matter of the highest improbability, for it was a capital crime. Had

the soldiers had to report to their military superiors, we may be sure they would never have made such a confession ; but as they were not in military employ for the moment, they were not subject to any such condemnation ; and unless the High Priests laid a complaint of their conduct before the Governor, they might feel themselves secure. But nothing could show the straits to which the Chief Priests were reduced, more than that they should be driven to protect their attitude by such a clumsy and even risky falsehood. They had to give much money to the soldiers who had to set this lie on foot, and no doubt had required a heavy bribe. If the matter had come to the Governor's ears the Jews would no doubt have persuaded him, as they promised, by another heavy bribe, for bribery was the great temptation of Roman officials.

"So," says St. Matthew, "they took the money and did as they were taught : and this saying"—meaning evidently this account of the matter—"was spread abroad among the Jews, and continueth until this day." The people at large, no doubt, were sufficiently under the control and domination of the Jewish rulers to accept any excuse that they made. The success of the Priests, in procuring our Lord's crucifixion, must have added immensely to their immediate authority ; and none would care to inquire into their statements, or to refute them. Thus it was that, the morning of the

Resurrection, the Jewish rulers bound on their souls, and on the souls of the Jewish people, an official repudiation of our Lord, and of the God from whom He came, and set their faces as a flint against any acknowledgment of Him or His authority. They had other evidences of His Resurrection, and of His loving power, brought before them soon afterwards in the Acts of the Apostles, but they had taken their course, and chosen their fate ; and nothing remained but that our Lord's judgment should be executed against them and that they should be overthrown, with their whole nation, in the destruction with which the Romans overwhelmed their city, their people, and their religious constitution.

It has been well observed that this is the most conspicuous instance of the truth of our Lord's saying : " If they hear not Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rose from the dead." People whose hearts are hardened against the truth cannot be convinced by mere signs and wonders. That appears to have been one of the reasons why our Lord constantly refused to work signs and wonders for the purpose of procuring belief in Himself. He knew that they would not procure such belief. If they could have done so, then His works of mercy and power, in the course of His ministry, were abundantly sufficient to have convinced the Jews. But their

hearts were set against His teaching, against the moral and spiritual claims which He made upon them, and no mere display of power could melt their hearts. It is still so with our Lord's claims. Indispensable as His miracles are, as a part of His message, and as a manifestation of His will and power, they will not convince men whose hearts are not touched by His teaching. Men and women who can resist that teaching, can much more easily resist an angelic manifestation, or even the resurrection from the dead. Christ has now made His last appeal to the rulers of His nation, and to the people who followed them. Henceforth He revealed Himself only to His own disciples, and to those whose hearts were open to Him. The Jewish nation is left to its fate, and He commences to lay in the hearts of His followers the foundation of a new Israel, and of a Kingdom of Heaven which will realise what the old Israel had been intended for.

VI

THE WALK TO EMMAUS

" And behold, two of them were going that very day to a village named Emmaus, which was threescore furlongs from Jerusalem. And they communed with each other of all these things which had happened. And it came to pass, while they communed and questioned together, that Jesus Himself drew near, and went with them. But their eyes were holden that they should not know Him. And He said unto them, What communications are these that ye have one with another, as ye walk ? And they stood still, looking sad. And one of them, named Cleopas, answering said unto Him, Dost Thou alone sojourn in Jerusalem and not know the things which are come to pass there in these days ? And He said unto them, What things ? And they said unto Him, The things concerning Jesus of Nazareth, which was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people : and how the chief priests and our rulers delivered Him up to be condemned to death, and crucified Him. But we hoped that it was He which should redeem Israel. Yea and beside all this, it is now the third day since these things came to pass. Moreover certain women of our company amazed us, having been early at the tomb ; and when they found not His body, they came, saying, that they had also seen a vision of angels, which said that He was alive. And certain of them that were with us went to the tomb, and found it even so as the women had said : but Him they saw not."—ST. LUKE xxiv. 13-24.

VI

THE WALK TO EMMAUS

THE next in order in the events recorded for us after our Lord's Resurrection is His appearance to the two disciples who were walking to Emmaus on the afternoon of the day of the Resurrection. It is a narrative of very deep and touching interest. It holds a most important place in our Lord's manifestations, and it also throws invaluable light upon the whole position of Jewish feeling at the time. It is a matter of extraordinary interest to know what was the state of feeling at the moment among the Jewish people at large. The crucifixion of our Lord had effected a great revolution in Jerusalem, and among the Jewish people. We should bear in mind that it was a sudden and overwhelming stroke, of which no one had dreamed, except the band of wicked and determined men who controlled the Jewish Council. Our Lord had been the Idol and the Hope of the people on the very day in the night of which He was seized. The Priests recognised that it was impossible to take Him by force in the face of the people. The

treachery of Judas alone enabled them to seize Him by night ; and they then resolved, with extraordinary audacity, to force His trial, condemnation, and execution through, before His friends could raise any movement in His defence. They did not know that He would not resist ; but they believed that He could not, and His submission enabled their expectations to be realised. The result was that He was on the Cross on the morning of the day after He was seized, and His friends and followers were paralysed. The authority wielded by the Chief Priests was immense, and by boldly charging Jesus with blasphemy, and exhibiting the supposed King of the Jews in a state of absolute helplessness, they turned a great portion, at all events, of the mob to their side. By His death on the Cross they appeared to have triumphed, and the people were at least silenced. But it cannot be supposed that the whole mass of the Jews who had followed and trusted our Lord were at once convinced that His claims had been false, and that He was not the Prophet and King in whom they had believed. It would be unjust to suppose that the whole people had abandoned in twenty-four hours, under the violence of the High Priests, the hope and trust and love which they had placed in our Lord. A time of silence and fear fell upon the city and the nation ; and we must bear in mind the terror thus produced by the action of the Jewish authorities

in order to understand the desertion of our Lord by His disciples. It seemed suddenly as if He had no power, and as if the Divine authority claimed by the High Priests was real and supreme ; but it would still seem contrary to human nature to suppose that the influence our Lord had won over multitudes of Jewish people had entirely disappeared ; and St. Peter's vacillations afford a vivid illustration of the conflicting feelings which must have still prevailed.

Now, if we bear this in mind, we shall perceive a singular historic interest attaching to the narrative of the walk to Emmaus, that answers the very question we should like to have answered, namely, what was the state of feeling among the followers of our Lord generally, in the days immediately after His Crucifixion ? The two disciples who went for a Sabbath day's walk to the neighbouring village of Emmaus, on the third day after the Crucifixion, seem to have been fair examples of the earnest followers of our Lord, of the circle who had surrounded Him and His Apostles. Neither of them was an Apostle, and the Cleopas who is mentioned was evidently not the one (even if the name be identical) who was related to our Lord's Mother : but they were among the inner circle of disciples, since they spoke of Mary Magdalene and of her companions as "certain women of our company." They had heard of the women's visit to the tomb,

and the subsequent visit of the two Apostles, and of their having found the tomb empty. We may consider them, therefore, as a fair example of the more faithful followers of our Lord outside the Apostolic circle. Their thoughts would reflect those which were prevalent in the ardent band that had welcomed our Lord to Jerusalem only some four days before ; and they let us see into their hearts. It is a sad and touching revelation. Our Lord approaches them in the form of a Sunday traveller like themselves. As St. Mark says, in his brief notice of the occurrence, " He appeared in another form," different from that in which He had appeared to Mary Magdalene, and induced them to admit Him to their conversation. There must have been some marks of sympathy in His address to them, and He notices that they were sad. " What manner of communications," He said, " are these that ye have to one another, as ye walk and are sad ? " Of course He knew ; but He wishes them to open their hearts to Him, that He might give them comfort and help. They at once tell Him that their hearts are full of the things that are come to pass in Jerusalem in these days ; and when He says, " What things ? " they express their astonishment that, even if only a stranger or a temporary resident in Jerusalem, He should be unaware of the troubles of which their hearts were full ; and then they go on to explain, and so to

reveal to us, what were the thoughts of earnest believers in our Saviour in Jerusalem at this moment. They tell us exactly the position which our Lord held in the minds of the class of the Jews whom they represent. Let us consider what this was.

Jesus of Nazareth, they say, was a prophet, mighty in deed and word, before God and all the people. That is a brief summary of the position which our Lord held among the Jewish people generally, and in fact among all who were not His declared enemies and in league with the Jewish rulers. It is a phrase which embodies the whole function of a prophet. He was mighty, first of all in word—the words of a prophet were endued with living and supernatural force, which penetrated into men's hearts, and compelled them to listen to Him as a messenger from God. Our Lord's words had been endued with that force in a supreme degree. He spoke with authority from first to last—an authority ever increasing, until it culminated in the tremendous utterances which brought His struggle with the rulers to an issue. He was felt to be speaking before God, in God's presence and with God's authority; He was also mighty in deed—in those miracles and wonders and signs which He wrought with a power which was manifestly Divine. This was the profound impression which, as these representative witnesses

tell us, Jesus of Nazareth had produced upon the people. This impression remained in the minds of numbers of them, even after the tremendous catastrophe of the Crucifixion. It seems important to dwell upon this fact if we are to understand the subsequent history. We do not sufficiently remember, perhaps, when reading the Acts of the Apostles, that the events in that book have all the background of the Gospels behind them. When Peter and John and the rest of the Apostles preached to the people Jesus of Nazareth, it is not merely of the risen Jesus whom they speak. There is vividly present, to the minds of all the Jews whom they address, the memory—nay, almost the very presence—of that Jesus who was “a prophet mighty in word and deed before God and all the people”; and when they call upon them to believe in Him as risen from the dead, it is not merely the risen Lord whom they have in mind, but that Prophet, that supreme Authority, full of mercy and tenderness and truth, exerting His power over sin and disease and all evil, among those who believed in Him. What they had to do was not to reveal a new and living Jesus, but simply to convince them that He had not been divided from them by His death of crucifixion, but that by His Resurrection He had resumed His gracious powers for their good, and, though withdrawn from their sight, was exerting them from His seat in Heaven.

But the renewal of our Lord's life of action in a spiritual sphere was that of which believers in the position of these two disciples had at present no conception ; and their position was one of infinite pathos. "We hoped," they said, "that it was He which should redeem Israel." They had indeed vague conceptions, as all men had before our Lord's Resurrection, and the descent of the Holy Spirit, of what that "redemption" meant. They only believed that it meant, in some way, the deliverance of the Jewish people from the subjection in which they were held to the Gentile power ; or, generally, in the words of the Song of Zacharias, "that we being delivered out of the hand of our enemies should serve Him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before Him all the days of our life." The approaching realisation of all those large hopes and great promises had been more and more rising in their minds, during the two or three years of the Ministry of Jesus of Nazareth ; and on the day of our Lord's entry into Jerusalem, in the circumstances predicted by the Prophet, they believed they were on the eve of their fulfilment by Him. But in less than twenty-four hours their hopes were dashed, and they were left to the melancholy reflection, "We hoped that it had been He which should have redeemed Israel." The blow seems aggravated, in their narration, by the fact that it had been struck by the solemnly

appointed rulers of their people. They relate how "the Chief Priests and our rulers delivered Him up to be condemned to death, and crucified Him." Some faint hope, indeed, had been raised in their minds that day by rumours that He was risen again. "Moreover," they say, "certain women of our company made us amazed, having been early at the tomb ; and when they found not His body, they came, saying they had also seen a vision of angels, which said that He was alive. And certain of them which were with us went to the tomb, and found it even so as the women had said : but Him they saw not." "Him they saw not." That is the conclusion of the sad story on which they were meditating, as they walked and were sad. The last words illustrated the perplexity and hopelessness in which the faithful followers of our Lord were left, even after the visit of Peter and John to the tomb. His body was not there, and Him they saw not. What would be the use or help of a bare knowledge of His having risen, if nothing more were known of Him, and no further explanation were to be vouchsafed ? We see at once, from that expression, that it is not the mere resurrection from the tomb, but all that followed after it, and the explanation of its message as given by our Lord Himself, which constitutes the Gospel of the Resurrection.

But if these considerations illustrate truly the

prevalent feelings in the minds of believers in our Lord like those two disciples at Emmaus, it would seem to throw a great light on what otherwise might appear an isolated and almost accidental occurrence. Why did our Lord vouchsafe this appearance to the two disciples, who, though deeply attached to Him, were not in His immediate circle ? Do not these considerations point to the belief that this manifestation had a special purpose for a special class of His followers ? Consider how His manifestations stood at the moment of this narrative. First of all, as was shown in the last address, the fact of His having burst His bonds, and left the tomb, was brought home to the rulers of the Jews in the only way which they could appreciate, by the display of supernatural force. The soldiers had been compelled to fly before the manifestation of an Angel, at whose sight they became as dead men, and they brought that patent and startling fact to the knowledge of their employers, the Chief Priests. As these preferred to make a lying bargain with Gentile soldiers rather than consider the evidence thus brought before them, there was an end of their case. Then it had been mercifully arranged that the devotion of the women should be the means of their being introduced to the tomb, and of being guided, by the gentle voice of an Angel, to see and to realise the fact that the Lord was no longer there ; and through them the most devoted

of the Apostles had been led to visit the tomb, and to learn, not only that our Lord's body was not there, but—what was of scarcely less importance—that His grave-clothes had been left in the tomb, lying as He wore them ; so that His body must have been delivered from the travails of mortal flesh by some supernatural influence. By this vision of the women and the two disciples, the way was prepared for the belief of the other Apostles, and their belief was to be completed in the evening of the same day by our Lord's personal appearance among them.

But there remained one class of His disciples whom these manifestations would not reach, and who would remain in the perplexity so painfully expressed by the two disciples in this conversation. Our Lord, by this manifestation to them, met the case of these other and more numerous followers. Of course, the effect of this conversation could not be confined to the two disciples. In the first place, they returned to Jerusalem that very hour, and brought the narrative of their blessed experience, and of our Lord's communication to them ; but the account of it could not fail to be spread abroad in the circle of the believers to whom these disciples belonged. They would tell many others how the Lord had not only been raised from the grave, but that He lived in all His old grace and tenderness ; that He had Himself brought a

message of comfort and encouragement to them, and that, though the Jewish rulers had put Him to death, He was still a living Lord and Friend. Amidst all the perplexities of such faithful followers, this would give them the chief assurance they needed, and they would be able to retain their faith in their Master, and wait patiently until His further purpose should be revealed. This occurrence, in short, so far from being isolated, forms really a gracious, and even essential, part of the various manifestations by which our Saviour announced His Resurrection to all whom it concerned, to His enemies, to His intimate followers, and now to the general circle of those who had believed in Him. But of course the value of that conversation depended mainly upon the teaching with which it was accompanied, and on the nature of the message which the Saviour sent by these two witnesses ; and the substance of that message we will consider in the next address.

VII

INSTRUCTION OF THE TWO
DISCIPLES

“ And He said unto them, O foolish men, and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken ! ”—ST. LUKE xxiv. 25.

VII

INSTRUCTION OF THE TWO DISCIPLES

IN the conversation we have already considered, the two disciples at Emmaus had laid before our Lord, with pathetic earnestness, the distress which was felt by themselves, and doubtless by the majority of our Lord's most faithful followers, at the sudden overthrow of all their hopes by His Crucifixion, through the action of the Chief Priests and rulers of the Jewish people. They "trusted that it had been He which should redeem Israel"; and though rumours were heard of His having risen from the tomb, yet He Himself seemed to have disappeared. "Him they saw not." It was a confession of something like despair, and they may have looked for some comfort from their Companion; but, if so, they must have been startled at the tone of His first words. It is not a tone of consolation, but of rebuke. "O foolish men," He says, "and slow of heart to believe in all that the Prophets have spoken." It turns indeed into a message of consolation, as He proceeds to explain to them what the Prophets had said and

its significance ; but it is, in the first instance, a rebuke to them for having indulged in feelings of despair for which there was no reason whatever, and which ought to have been prevented by their knowledge of the Holy Scriptures. You speak, He implies, of these sufferings, and of the death of the Prophet whom you believed to be the Messiah, as though this was inconsistent with His claims, and were a defeat of them. You ought to have known that, on the contrary, they are the last and final testimony to those claims, and the conclusive proof that He is the Messiah for whom your Scriptures have taught you to look. It was an essential part of His office that He should be thus put to death and rejected by His own people ; your Scriptures, on which you rest your hope of a Messiah and great Deliverer, told you so beforehand, and you ought to have had your faith confirmed, and not shattered, by it.

In point of fact, not only ought they to have learned this from the Scriptures, but our Lord Himself, during His lifetime, told His disciples again and again that He was to suffer this rejection and death. The whole of His last discourses are, in fact, shadowed by intimations of this nature. We read, for instance, in the eighteenth chapter of St. Luke, at the time when He had “ set His face to go to Jerusalem,” that “ He took unto Him the twelve and said unto them, Behold, we go up to

Jerusalem, and all things that are written by the Prophets shall be accomplished unto the Son of Man. For He shall be delivered up unto the Gentiles, and shall be mocked and shamefully entreated and spit upon ; and they shall scourge and kill Him, and the third day He shall rise again ” ; but, it is added, “ They understood none of these things, and this saying was hid from them, and they perceived not the things that were said.” It was to them, in fact, inconceivable, even to the last, that the Lord whom they believed to be the Messiah and King of His people, should be rejected by them and suffer such ignominy. It may be allowed that there was one point in our Lord’s announcement which it was almost impracticable for them to realise, namely, that He would rise again. That was a circumstance beyond all experience and realisation, and one that could not be present to their minds with the distinctness and assurance with which it was present to our Lord Himself. But still, our Lord rebukes Peter on one occasion for not being willing to believe His prediction of the fate before Him, and implies, more than once, that believers in the Jewish scriptures ought to have been ready to accept it. His own thoughts, as is shown on more than one occasion, were filled with this sense of the prophecies of the Scriptures, and submission to them was a cardinal motive in His whole life and action. At

a critical moment He exclaimed : “ Thinkest thou that I cannot now pray to My Father, and He shall presently give Me more than twelve legions of angels. But how then shall the Scriptures be fulfilled that thus it must be ? ” It was revealed in the ancient Scriptures that He should suffer and die, and that was sufficient reason for His submission to it.

But, it might be asked, why should the mere fact, that Christ was to suffer these things according to the Prophets, remove the distress and despair which was aroused by their infliction ? The answer is, that the Scriptures, throughout, teach that the suffering and death which were thus to be endured by our Lord were essential to His fulfilling that office of a Saviour which was the highest glory of the Messiah. Why had the Prophets predicted these sufferings ? Because they were inspired to see that it was bound up with the very nature of things that the salvation of mankind should be won at the cost of suffering, and that the Being who would be the chief agent in accomplishing that salvation would suffer the most. The case is not that certain actions must be performed, and suffering endured, for the sake of the fulfilment of prophecy ; but that the Prophets had been granted an insight into the fact that the salvation of men could not be wrought out otherwise, and that the sacrifice of the Messiah was the indispensable condition of the final deliverance of mankind from sin and evil. It needed more

than human insight to apprehend this truth in all its fulness ; but it should be of assistance to us in realising it to remember, once more, that it was in great measure foreseen by the profoundest human wisdom in the ancient world. By an amazing force of insight, Socrates is represented by Plato as teaching that, if a perfectly just man ever appeared in the world, He would be hated, rejected, and finally put to a cruel death. What Socrates foresaw was that perfect justice and goodness would be felt to be a reproach and condemnation to the evil and sin of mankind, that this condemnation would be angrily resented, and the evil passions of men would be so strong as to be satisfied with nothing but the destruction of the witness against them. That is exactly what happened in the history of our Lord. As He Himself said of His enemies : " Now have they both seen and hated both Me and My Father." They had seen perfect goodness, and it had aroused inextinguishable hatred in their minds.

So far the highest human wisdom could penetrate. What it needed Divine knowledge to realise was that the suffering and death, thus necessarily endured by the perfectly just Man, might, if He willed, be offered as a sacrifice for the sin which had led to it, and that it might be the source of an influence of gratitude, love, and mercy, which would be an eternal centre of life and

righteousness to mankind. These consequences of the life and death of the Messiah are foreseen, from first to last, in the Scriptures of the Old Testament ; and those who believed in those Scriptures ought to have seen, as our Lord did, that His rejection and crucifixion were really the culmination of His work and office upon earth, and the starting-point of His finished work as a Saviour after His Resurrection. Instead, therefore, of the disciples being thrown into consternation by His death, they ought to have welcomed the fact that the Jesus, whom they believed to be their Messiah, had completed the most essential part of His redeeming office, that He had made a sacrifice for the sins of mankind, and that His work of spiritual deliverance could now proceed freely ; that, in short, He had entered into His glory, and that the faith of His followers rested on an unshakable foundation.

We might well feel that we would have given anything to hear from our Saviour that grand exposition of the meaning of God's will as revealed in the ancient Scriptures. What would we not give if our hearts could burn within us, as when He opened the Scriptures to those disciples ? But there is no need for such a feeling of disappointment, for we possess that exposition. It was given not only to those two disciples, but a little later to the eleven Apostles. To them, too, as is recorded a few verses further on, our Lord said : " These are

My words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled, which are written in the Law of Moses, and in the Prophets, and in the Psalms concerning Me. Then opened He their minds, that they might understand the Scriptures ; and He said unto them, Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer, and should rise again from the dead the third day ; and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name unto all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem.” Our Lord thus charged His Apostles to proclaim the substance of this exposition of the Scriptures to His people, and to all the world ; and consequently we may see in the subsequent teaching of the Apostles, both in their sermons in the Acts and in their Epistles, the substance of our Lord’s exposition of the ancient Scriptures, as given to them immediately after His Resurrection. If we are ever disposed to wonder why more is not recorded for us of our Lord’s discourses during the forty days in which He associated with the Apostles, it is because He left them, by their preaching and their writing, with the aid of the Holy Spirit, to convey it to His followers and to the world at large. In following the preaching of the Apostles, and in reading their Epistles, it is our privilege ever to bear in mind that we are reading the words of men who had themselves had the Scriptures expounded to them by our Lord

Himself, and that we therefore have in substance our Lord's own teaching and exposition. This passage, in fact, gives perhaps the highest authority of all for the profound homage to the Scriptures, both of the Old and of the New Testaments, which prevailed in the Christian Church from the outset. With respect to the Old Testament, we have our Lord's express declaration, given in some of the last words He uttered on earth, and after His Resurrection, that whatever they revealed respecting the will of God must be fulfilled, and that if we want to learn all that will, we must give ourselves up to the understanding of those Scriptures. With respect to the New, we have the assurance that the men who wrote them had heard from our Lord, not only the teaching which is recorded in the Gospels, but His own solemn exposition of the meaning of the Scriptures, and that they are animated by the Spirit of our Lord Himself.

But, apart from this incidental instruction respecting the Holy Scriptures, which in the present day is of special importance, the chief thing we have to learn from this message of our Lord to the two disciples, and to all His disciples through them, is to remember that His death should be to us a matter for thankfulness and hope, no less than His subsequent Resurrection. It is by a true instinct that Good Friday has received its designation, as a day which conferred on mankind an

infinite good. If men were to be saved, it was essential that something should be done which would stamp on the whole world an apprehension of the evil of sin, and would reveal unmistakably its fearful consequences. In the ordinary course of things, that is done by God's providence allowing evil thoughts and deeds to work themselves out to their miserable results, but the full revelation of the nature of evil could not be provided by these detailed experiences. One such revelation of what evil involves we see before us now in this awful War, which is the natural and inevitable result of the indulgence on the one side of the passions of pride, ambition, and covetousness, and on the other, of prolonged indifference to the maintenance of justice, and unwillingness to bear the burden of its assertion. But evil could only be manifested in its deepest horror when it is seen to involve, as it did in the case of our Lord, the rejection and hatred of all that is most holy, good, and true. That exhibition could only be afforded if the perfectly holy, just, and loving Person, towards whom it was manifested, was willing to endure it, without appealing to the Divine Majesty, with which He was one, to save Him from it. Our Lord, lifted up from the earth on Calvary, holds up between Heaven and earth the eternal picture, both of that evil and of that love and goodness; and He is able to appeal to His Father, that that

sacrifice may be deemed sufficient vindication of eternal righteousness, and sufficient condemnation of human sin.

That redeeming influence has been working on the minds of men ever since, and we may be confident that if its influence had not been obscured in Europe of late years by false teaching and selfish ambition, such a War as is now menacing civilisation with ruin could not have broken out. We ought to spend Good Friday under a sense of deep sorrow for the sins which produced, by natural consequence, those agonies, and deep grief that we ourselves should have to confess that we have our share in them. But, nevertheless, the thankfulness with which our Lord bade these two disciples to contemplate them should be our dominant feeling ; we should be filled with an infinite gratitude that those sufferings have been endured, and that, by means of them, eternal forgiveness and redemption have been purchased for all men, if they will only accept them by surrendering themselves to the Saviour. May we not also, in the midst of the struggle by which, as we hope and confidently believe, the liberation of the world from a wicked tyranny will be secured, entertain a similar gratitude that that great issue is being finally fought out ; that millions of our own countrymen, and of our kinsmen and allies, are found willing, like the Saviour Himself, to give their blood and their

lives for the deliverance of mankind from a horrible evil and to stamp it with an everlasting condemnation? Let us not be "foolish and slow of heart" to believe that the messages of the Scriptures, from first to last, culminating in the sacrifice of Calvary, are still being fulfilled, even in our bitter experiences to-day, and let us think with deep thankfulness as well as with hope, of those sufferings which our soldiers and representatives are now enduring, being assured that they are a necessary prelude to the glory and peace which are to follow.

VIII

MANIFESTATION TO THE TWO

“ And they drew nigh unto the village, whither they were going, and He made as though He would go further. And they constrained Him, saying, Abide with us : for it is toward evening, and the day is now far spent. And He went in to abide with them. And it came to pass, when He had sat down with them to meat, He took the bread, and blessed it, and brake, and gave to them. And their eyes were opened, and they knew Him ; and He vanished out of their sight. And they said one to another, Was not our heart burning within us, while He spake to us in the way, while He opened to us the scriptures ? And they rose up that very hour, and returned to Jerusalem, and found the eleven gathered together, and them that were with them, saying, The Lord is risen indeed, and hath appeared to Simon. And they rehearsed the things that *happened* in the way, and how He was known of them in the breaking of the bread.”—
St. LUKE xxiv. 28-35.

VIII

MANIFESTATION TO THE TWO

IN these meditations on the story of our Lord's Resurrection, we have now reached almost the final stage before His Ascension. Our last meditation was on our Lord's conversation with the two disciples during their Sunday afternoon walk to Emmaus. We observed what a gracious and momentous interposition was to be recognised in that appearance and discourse of our Lord. To the two disciples, and to all to whom its substance was communicated, it had the effect of lifting the cloud which hung over their hearts in consequence of His Crucifixion. The two disciples evidently expressed the feeling of our Lord's followers when they described how they "had hoped that it had been He which should redeem Israel"; and how when the Chief Priests and the rulers had condemned Him to death and crucifixion, that seemed to them the overthrow of all their hopes, and the nullification of all the promises which had been held out to them. But our Lord proved to them from the Scriptures that those sufferings,

and even that Crucifixion, had really been the fulfilment of the predictions of the Prophets. They were, in fact, the best evidence that our Lord was the Christ who had been promised to them. It is the same argument which St. Paul subsequently urged, in the synagogue of Thessalonica (Acts xvii.), when he reasons with the Jews out of the Scriptures, “opening and alleging that it behoved the Christ to suffer, and to rise again from the dead, and that this Jesus, whom I proclaim unto you, is the Christ.” The very Passion and death which had shaken their faith ought to be an assurance to it, for it identified the Sufferer with the Messiah who had been predicted, and whom they had believed our Lord to be. According to the word of God, their living Lord could not be the Christ, the predicted King of the Jews, unless He had gone through that bitter experience. Now that He was risen, He came before them with all the marks of the anointed King of the Jews upon Him, and His Passion and death were an essential element in their faith. These explanations and assurances were the key to all the subsequent apostolic preaching ; and these two disciples were thus privileged to hear from our Lord’s own lips the explanation of His death and resurrection.

An observation has been made upon this statement of our Lord which, in the present day, it is peculiarly important for us to bear in mind. It is

that we have thus from our Lord Himself a solemn declaration that the Scriptures throughout, from Moses and all the Prophets, pointed to Him, and contain a prophetic revelation of His office and of the manner in which it would be fulfilled. Their character in this respect cannot be doubted without doubting the positive statement of our Lord Himself, made after His death and resurrection, with the definite purpose of instructing and consoling His disciples, at a moment when their faith was grievously shaken. But this could only be the case if those Scriptures, beginning from Moses through all the Prophets, were written under that Divine influence which is generally called Inspiration. Nothing but a direct Divine information could, for instance, have enabled the Psalmist to depict with such striking circumstantiality the facts of our Lord's Passion, or could have given a prophet like Isaiah so clear a vision of the Man of Sorrows, who "was wounded for our transgressions and bruised for our iniquities." Scriptures in which all these dread realities are so clearly foreseen must, in the eyes of Christian men, bear a supreme sacredness ; and it must be impossible to accept any treatment of them which regards them as merely human productions, liable to the errors of human authors. They should rather be regarded as the shrine in which the Christ was guarded, until the moment came when the veil which shrouded

Him was rent in twain, and He was manifested in His full glory, as the suffering, dying, and risen Lord. This, in fact, is the prophecy of prophecies. It is universally acknowledged that the Jews of our Lord's day were looking for the coming of the Messiah, but their eyes were fastened on the predictions of His glory. It was not until our Lord had actually suffered and died that they could open their eyes to the predictions of His sufferings ; but our Lord showed that these sufferings were an essential feature of the prophetic picture, and that His death was thus the necessary condition of His entering into glory.

It would seem that this momentous exposition had been practically completed when the two disciples reached the village of Emmaus, where they intended to stay for the night ; but our Lord had no such intention, and so made as though He would have left them and gone farther ; but they constrained Him, saying, “ Abide with us : for it is toward evening, and the day is now far spent ” ; and He went in and abode with them. The request seems to have been one of simple courtesy, though of course prompted by a reluctance to lose a Companion from whom they had received such profound instruction and consolation. The incident may be very legitimately applied in our familiar hymn, “ Abide with me, fast falls the eventide ; the darkness deepens, Lord with me

abide"; but it is rather a concern for their Companion than for themselves which is actually conveyed by the invitation. He appears to comply with it, and goes in to tarry with them, and He sits down with them at a meal. But He at once takes precedence, and opens the meal by the prayer and blessing which was customary among the Jews. He took bread and blessed it, and brake it, and gave to them; and then "their eyes were opened, and they knew Him; and He vanished out of their sight." That was like the completion of the revelation He had been giving them. He had shown them out of the Scriptures that it was necessary that the Christ should suffer and be crucified: He now revealed to them the fact that He had risen from the dead. So far as we know, up to that point none of the Apostles, at all events, had seen Him alive after His burial. It had been said that certain women of their company had found the sepulchre empty, and that they had seen a vision of angels, which said that He was alive; and certain of them that were with them had been to the tomb, and found it even so as the women had said, "but Him they saw not." But now they themselves saw Him, and they knew that He was alive. They were assured of His identity, not only by the vision of their own eyes, but by the force of the words He had spoken unto them. "Was not," they exclaimed, "our heart burning

within us, while He spoke to us by the way, and while He opened unto us the Scriptures ? ” They realised that it had been a more than human voice which spoke to them, and that they had been in the presence of the Saviour in His own human form, as they had known Him, and with all His spiritual power. This was not a mere vision. The living Christ had been with them, and they could no longer feel any doubt or sadness. They rose up that very hour and returned to Jerusalem, to convey the blessed news to the Apostles and their companions. They went straight to the Eleven, whom they found gathered together, “ and they that were with them,” and were met with the news that our Lord had appeared unto Simon Peter. It would seem, however, that this appearance to Peter, which is not more particularly described to us, had not convinced the Eleven, and their companions, of the fact of the Resurrection. For St. Mark (xvi. 13) says that “ they went and told it to the Eleven, neither believed they them.” The Eleven had heard it first from the women, and then from St. Peter, but, as it was on a later occasion, “ some doubted.” But the two disciples now brought them the account of what was done in the way, and how the Lord was known to them in the breaking of bread ; yet, as we shall read on a subsequent occasion, they were not yet fully convinced. The evidence of these witnesses needed

the support of our Lord's own appearance among them, which we will next consider.

Meanwhile, there are two or three striking points in this narrative of the two disciples, which claim some special consideration. There are the facts that at first they did not recognise our Lord, that He was suddenly revealed to them in the breaking of bread, and that He vanished out of their sight. The reason of their not recognising Him is ascribed in the narrative, not to any disguise in His appearance, but to the exercise of a spiritual influence over them. It is said at first that "their eyes were holden, that they should not know Him"; and at the end that "their eyes were opened and they knew Him." It was not any change in our Lord's body which obscured Him, but that by His power a veil was thrown over their eyes. The miraculous action was, in this case, wrought on them, not in Him. When we read, therefore, at the conclusion, that He was known of them in the breaking of bread, we cannot conclude that it was that action which specially revealed Him; as though there had been in it some special characteristic of Him, but that He Himself chose that moment to withdraw the veil from their eyes. Nevertheless, they were certainly privileged to see Him in an action which recalled one of His most sacred moments. The Lord's Supper had been instituted only three days before; and though

neither of the two disciples was likely to have been present, the fact of so solemn an action cannot fail to have been known among other disciples, as well as the Apostles, and its recent memory would flash upon them. It seems, moreover, not an unreasonable conjecture that, in the action of taking the bread and blessing it, He revealed the sacred scars which were subsequently exposed to convince Thomas: but there is no reason whatever to suppose that He was commencing a Celebration, which He did not conclude, of the Sacrament He had just instituted. As these two disciples were evidently in the inner circle of His followers, they had doubtless seen Him break bread and bless it, and we may well believe that there was something characteristic in His manner of doing so. At all events it would seem that He chose for thus opening their eyes a moment which would serve in a striking degree to recall Him to their minds.

These details will serve, I think, to afford us a very vivid impression of this memorable scene, and will make us feel its intense reality, as well as the depth of the revelation respecting the meaning of our Lord's Passion which it contains. But it remains to consider a further important point in the transaction, namely, why did our Lord vanish? Why, having thus prepared the two disciples for the due apprehension of His work, His life and death, did He suddenly leave them?

The question must be considered in relation to the whole course of our Lord's action in His various ministrations. We find that He always withdrew Himself as soon as the purpose of His manifestation was effected, as though He would avoid any close personal association in His glorified condition. The most characteristic instance is the manner in which He checked Mary Magdalene after her first eager recognition of Him. "Jesus saith unto her, Mary. She turned herself and saith unto Him, Rabboni ; which is to say, Master"—or perhaps, my Master—"Jesus saith unto her, Touch Me not ; for I am not yet ascended to My Father : but go to My brethren . . ." He seems to imply that the old social intercourse was not to be resumed. He had entered already to some extent, though not fully, into His glory, and He was to be treated with a new reverence and distance. He was no longer "in the form of a servant, and made in the likeness of men." He was resuming His divine form and authority. In a similar way, on this occasion, as soon as He is revealed, and the purpose of His communication with the two disciples is accomplished, He can no longer take part in the common meal and in ordinary social intercourse, but at once resumes His invisible majesty. I would suggest, as on a previous occasion, that this conveys a warning to ourselves which is not unnecessary. There is some danger, to which some

of our popular hymns have yielded, to speak of our Lord in His personal existence with a familiarity which is not consonant with a due regard to His Divine nature and His awful authority. It is true we have the privilege of intimate communion with Him, but it is through His Spirit ; and in proportion to the depth of that spiritual communion will be the reverence and awe felt for the Person of our Lord and our God. Even the familiar use of the name "Jesus" is not in harmony with the custom of the Apostles in their Epistles, who speak of Him generally as "Christ-Jesus," or "Jesus Christ," or the "Lord Jesus." We shall do well to follow their example, remembering that "He is in heaven and we are upon earth," and that He, though in His human form, now sits upon the Throne, and that we are sinners at His footstool.

IX

APPEARANCE TO THE ELEVEN

" And afterward He was manifested unto the eleven themselves as they sat at meat ; and He upbraided them with their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they believed not them which had seen Him after He was risen."—ST. MARK xvi. 14.

IX

APPEARANCE TO THE ELEVEN

THE evening of the day of our Lord's Resurrection culminated in a most momentous scene. In the afternoon He had held with the two disciples, on the way to Emmaus, the illuminating conversation we have been considering. He immediately vanished from them, and they went back in haste to Jerusalem and found the Eleven gathered together, and others with them. They were met by the news that the Lord had appeared unto Simon, and they communicated to the assembly what had passed on their own journey, and how our Lord was made known to them in the breaking of bread. But we are told by St. Mark that, even then, the fact of our Lord's Resurrection was not fully believed. The Eleven, up to this point, met all the reports of our Lord's appearance with persistent doubt. As St. Mark records, in the first place, when Mary Magdalene brought the news of His appearance to her and those that had been with her, as they mourned and wept, "they, when they had heard that He was alive, and had been seen of her, believed not. After that, He

was manifested in another form unto two of them as they walked, on their way into the country. And they went and told it unto the rest ; neither believed they them.” Then there was the further testimony of St. Peter, but they were still unconvinced.

But at that moment our Lord Himself suddenly appeared among them. Perhaps it was in consideration for their weakness that He had not appeared to them before, for, in the condition of their minds, if His first appearance had been to the whole body of the disciples, they might have been overwhelmed with apprehension. As it was, St. Luke tells us, they were “terrified and affrighted, and supposed that they beheld a spirit.” The fact that three of their company had already seen Him, and that He had appeared in His old form and spoken to them graciously, could not but mitigate their fear ; but, even so, He had to pacify and reassure them. “He said to them, Why are ye troubled ? and wherefore do reasonings arise in your hearts ? Behold My hands and My feet, that it is I Myself : handle Me, and see,” He said, “for a spirit hath not flesh and bones as ye behold Me having. And when He had said this, He showed them His hands and His feet,” marked, of course, by the wounds of the nails. That relieved their fear ; but it was still too much for them to believe. Their very joy checked their realisation of the truth. It was too much to be real ; so He gave them further

evidence of the human reality of His person. "While they yet believed not for joy, and wondered, He said unto them, Have ye here anything to eat? And they gave Him a piece of a broiled fish . . . and He took it and did eat before them." At that evidence of the physical reality of His body their doubts seem to have ceased, and He is able to address to them momentous words, which we will consider in a subsequent address.

But before entering on those words, two or three matters of the gravest import seem to arise out of this narrative. The first is that it is a conclusive disproof of the suggestions which have been urged, in disparagement of the evidence for the Resurrection, to the effect that the Apostles and followers of our Lord were in eager expectation of His return to them, and were in such a state of excited hope, that it was natural for them to imagine appearances, and see visions, of the Master whom they had loved and lost. Every point in the narrative shows that precisely the opposite was the case. When Mary Magdalene came to them, she found them mourning and weeping, and the words of the women "seemed to them as idle talk, and they believed them not." Then came the evidence of the two disciples and of Peter, and neither believed they them. Then, at the close of the same day, came the appearance of our Lord Himself among them; and they hesitated to believe

their own eyes. They cannot believe it is the very Lord Himself, and He has to invite them to handle Him, and has to condescend to eat some food, before they are satisfied. In fact, St. Mark tells us that He “upbraided them with their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they believed not them which had seen Him after He was risen.” What the nature of that upbraiding was may be gathered from His language to the two disciples, to whom He said: “O foolish men, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Ought not the Christ to have suffered these things and to have entered into His glory?” It does, in fact, seem to involve great dulness of mind and hardness of heart, that they should find it difficult to believe the facts revealed to them. They had been in His company for months, if not for years, and He had told them, again and again, of the fate which was before Him. He had, again and again, said, what He had spoken while He was in Galilee, that “the Son of Man should be betrayed into the hands of men, and they should kill Him, and the third day He should be raised again.” He had told them that this suffering and Resurrection was in accordance with the prophecies of the Scriptures. But, we are told, “they understood none of these things, and this saying was hid from them, neither believed they the things that were spoken.” They were absorbed in the great works that He was

daily performing, in His teaching, and in their expectations of the coming of His kingdom ; and they could not for a moment realise the awful realities which He predicted.

There might be much said in explanation of this state of mind, but I am only concerned now to observe the fact. Notwithstanding all that He had done to prepare the minds of the disciples, both the suffering and the Resurrection of our Lord were entirely contrary to the expectations of the Apostles, and of all our Lord's followers. Not even the faithful women, whose minds were so much more receptive than those of the men, had apprehended the possibility of it. Consequently, the evidence recorded in the Gospels of our Lord's appearances after His Resurrection has, in an eminent degree, the value of the testimony of witnesses who were prejudiced against the facts which they relate ; and there is no reasonable explanation to be given of those reports than that the facts actually occurred. The belief in His Resurrection was, we may almost say, extorted from them, and all suggestions that their reports are the results of imagination and of visions are utterly unfounded. Our faith in the facts of the Resurrection rests on an extraordinarily strong foundation, even from the mere human point of view, apart from the question of the inspiration of the Evangelists.

The considerations may be held to be of peculiar value at a time when doubts are raised, even by many who write as Christians, on the literal and, if I may say so, hard reality of the narratives of the Resurrection. But there is another point of view from which these considerations are of great value in meeting modern difficulties. It is urged at the present time, even by men of authoritative position in the Church, that the narratives of the Gospels, and some of the statements of the Creeds, are not to be taken in too strict and literal a sense, and are to be given a spiritual interpretation. For instance, that the narrative of our Lord's Ascension is not to be taken as evidence that He actually rose into a region above this earth ; that Heaven is not to be regarded as a sphere physically above us, but that His Ascension only means that He entered into a state of existence of a spiritual kind, in which we are to regard Him as superior to all earthly conditions. The best reply to these modernist suggestions is that these narratives of our Lord's Resurrection, containing peculiarly irrefragable testimony, reveal as a fact that our Lord did, immediately after His burial, vanish—to use the words in the narrative of the two disciples—from human sight. He reappeared in that sight whenever He pleased, under conditions which were superior to all physical laws. When He came to the disciples in the evening we have

been considering, the doors were closed, and He appeared suddenly standing among them. The disciples apprehended that He was only a spirit ; but He allowed them to satisfy themselves that they were in the presence of the real human body of our Lord, with the marks upon it of His suffering on the Cross. Then He disappeared for a while, but appeared again eight days after, and was seen of the Apostles during forty days, " speaking of the things pertaining to the Kingdom of God." Two facts were unmistakably established. One, that He existed in a region or state which was inaccessible to mortal eyes ; and, secondly, that He was able to leave that region or state, and appear in the full reality of a human body among men. What that region or state is, we know not, and can form no conception of it. We only know that it is ineffably superior to our present existence, and that it is not divided from us by an impassable barrier. These facts are enough to justify our belief in the literal truth of the Ascension. That on that occasion He rose visibly before the eyes of the Apostles, and thus left them under the impression that He was entering upon a loftier and superior sphere, was doubtless a symbolical act, which is independent of any merely physical conceptions of a heaven located above this earth. When the Psalmists speak of the heavens and of the earth, and of the Lord descending from Heaven, they are

speaking with the imagination of great poets, and had no idea of a mechanical or material heaven. The language of the Angels, at the Ascension, states simply and clearly the meaning of the manifestation—" This Jesus which was received up from you into Heaven shall so come in like manner as ye beheld Him going into Heaven." He is no more separated from us in a distant physical region than He was when, after His Resurrection, He came and went as He would ; when His disciples realised that He was exalted to a spiritual existence superior to their own ; but that when He appeared, He was altogether Himself, as He said, " It is I, Myself."

A further consideration, which we may well draw from these facts is that we have reason to be on our guard lest we should expose ourselves to deserve being upbraided as the disciples were, for our own unbelief and hardness of heart, in not believing them that had seen Him after He was risen. The modern views to which I have been referring, seem to be perilously near the condition of mind which was thus upbraided by our Lord. But without entering upon such speculations, it may be well for us to consider whether we live habitually in the realisation of the great spiritual realities which are revealed to us by these manifestations, and by similar facts narrated in the Gospels. We have it revealed to us by these narratives, that even in this world we are closely surrounded by spiritual realities, which

may dawn upon us at any moment. When our Lord had parted from His disciples, there was no sign of His being near them, no trace of His Presence was left to mortal sight ; and yet, as the manner of His appearances shows, He was always near them, and could appear to them and speak to them at any moment. The narratives of the Angels in the Gospels afford another revelation of a spiritual world which is “at hand,” and of which ordinarily we see no trace. At our Lord’s birth a multitude of the Heavenly host suddenly filled the Heavens ; and at His Resurrection, Angels were at hand to guard the sepulchre, to direct and comfort the women and the two Apostles who visited it. We have evidence, moreover, that His Ascension did not remove Him from His association with us here. It was the ascended Lord who appeared audibly, if not also visibly, to St. Paul, and both visibly and audibly to St. John. Although, therefore, He has now vanished from our sight, it behoves us to think of ourselves as living in His Presence, and to remember always that that Presence will some day be revealed to ourselves, and to all the world, when He returns to judge the quick and the dead. If we wish to appreciate the realities amidst which we live, we shall bear in mind that we are surrounded by a world of spiritual and angelic beings—some, alas, evil, but others, the ministers and servants of our Lord ; and that our whole life, and our very

thoughts are open to Him, and in some degree also to them. This is surely a very solemnising and inspiring thought ; and it would be impossible for us to live mainly for the interests of the visible world, if we lived in thought in that world invisible. For all purposes of our moral and spiritual life, the Lord is as much at hand to us as He was to the Apostles at the time of His Resurrection, and if we lift our hearts to Him in prayer, He is ever at hand to hear us and to help us.

X

CHARGE TO THE ELEVEN

"Jesus therefore said to them again, Peace *be* unto you: as the Father hath sent Me, even so send I you."—ST. JOHN xx. 21.

X

CHARGE TO THE ELEVEN

WE pass to consider the words which our Lord spoke to the Eleven, and to those who were with them, when He revealed Himself to them on the evening of the day of the Resurrection, and had convinced them that He Himself was with them. They are brief words ; and it is instructive to bear in mind that brevity is characteristic of the most momentous utterances in the Gospels. The solemn commission of the Son by the Father is contained, both at His Baptism and at His Transfiguration, in the simple sentence, “ This is My beloved Son in whom I am well pleased,” or “ This is My beloved Son, hear Him.” That is all ; but it concentrates in a few words the whole substance of the Lord’s office and authority. Consider again how very brief are the words in which our Saviour Himself instituted the two Sacraments, even the Lord’s Supper. When we consider how much has grown out of those brief injunctions, it is astonishing to realise the fulness of meaning which they contain. Our Lord seems to leave it to His Apostles and to His

Church to learn by experience the depth of His meaning. By restricting His utterance to one simple statement He forces upon us the essential substance of His creative words. His utterances on these momentous occasions recall, in fact, the majestic utterances of the Creation : " God said, Let there be light, and there was light " ; so in this instance we have before us on this great occasion two short declarations, and we shall find that they are the declarations of a new spiritual creation, and are the source of the whole life of the spiritual history of mankind which was to follow.

We have two accounts of these utterances. One, the verses in St. Luke which follow those which we have been considering ; the other in the condensed narrative of the occurrences of this evening which is given by St. John. The two are coincident in meaning, but that of St. John is peculiarly concentrated and pregnant, as is his wont, and we shall find it instructive to consider it first. He summarises the details we have already considered in the few words : " Jesus came and stood in the midst, and saith unto them, Peace be unto you ; and when He had said this, He showed unto them His hands and His side. The disciples therefore were glad, when they saw the Lord." When you recall the parallel account in St. Luke you will recognise what a mass of conflicting feelings and utterances is summed up in this brief

statement. Then, we read, Jesus said to them again, "Peace be unto you." That was the customary salutation among the Jews; but its repetition by our Lord indicates the profound meaning with which it was uttered on this occasion. By the Eleven at all events, it must have been felt to be an echo of the words He had spoken to them on the evening before His Passion: "Peace I leave with you, My peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid." After all the misery and despair of the last three days, He had come to bring them the peace He had promised. He brought them, in truth, much more than personal peace. He had made the sacrifice to God which established peace between God and man, and it would be their privilege for the future to realise that peace for themselves, and to proclaim it to others. "Peace be with you," He said; and He proceeds in two sentences to state the consequences which would follow it.

The first is, "As My Father hath sent Me, even so send I you." In those words is contained the creation of the Christian Church. It is to be remembered that our Lord is addressing not only the Eleven but, as St. Luke says, "them that were with them." It was a gathering like that described in the first chapter of the Acts of the Apostles, when a number of persons were gathered together around

the Apostles. It was the germ of the future Church, and our Lord declares to them, in a sentence, what their future mission would be, "As My Father hath sent Me, even so send I you." The whole of His own work, His own position, is summed up in the words, "My Father hath sent Me." It has been observed by Bishop Westcott that the phrase says more than that the Father did send Me. It says, "He hath sent Me." It was a commission which was not over because of His death. It is a permanent commission which He still holds. He is the supreme Apostle of God, the Son of the Father, "the brightness of His glory and the express image of His Person. Who, when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high." In that office He came into the world, and that office He holds and executes still. But He was now about to leave the world, and to cease to discharge His commission, as He had done hitherto, by visible action among men. Another agency was therefore to be found to execute His commission, and that agency He here declares was henceforth to be the Apostles, and the disciples with them : "As My Father once for all sent Me, so now I send you." They were henceforth to bear to the world the message with which He was entrusted—the revelation which He had vouchsafed. They were to be His deputies, conveying the will of God to mankind,

and bringing it home by word and deed to all the world. Our saintly George Herbert, in his account of the duties of a Country Parson, begins by saying, "A Pastor is the deputy of Christ for the reducing of man to the obedience of God. This definition," he adds, "is evident, and contains the direct steps of pastoral duty and authority. For first, man fell from God by disobedience; secondly, Christ is the glorious instrument of God for the revoking of man; thirdly, Christ being not to continue on earth, but after He had fulfilled the work of reconciliation, to be received up into Heaven, He constituted deputies in His place; and these are Priests. And therefore St. Paul, in the beginning of his Epistles professeth this; and in the first chapter to the Colossians plainly avoucheth that he fills up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ in his flesh, for His body's sake, which is the Church. Wherein," George Herbert concludes, "is contained the complete definition of a Minister." There could hardly be a better exposition of the import of this declaration of our Lord.

I have spoken of these as creative words, and the creation was immediately realised. Our Lord proceeded to bid His disciples to wait until a further promise which He gave them was fulfilled. But fifty days afterwards, when He bestowed the Holy Spirit upon them, the Apostles came forward publicly as the leaders and representatives of the

Christian Church. A visible society appeared, of men who formed a definite Kingdom in the world, living by the laws of Christ, and proclaiming to all people His authority, and the will of God which He had revealed. It will help us to realise it, if we bear in mind that nothing of the kind had existed in the world before. The Jewish Church and people were indeed such a Society, the special people of God, but they were not given a commission to the world at large. The rest of the world was destitute of any visible authority which claimed to bring revelations and commands from the Creator of all things, the Supreme Judge of mankind. There were wise and good men in all nations, especially in Greece and Rome, who read more or less aright the law written in their consciences, and whose teaching had done much to maintain the great moral principles of truth and righteousness among men. But they could be only seekers after wisdom, and could use only the weapons of exhortation and counsel. The best of them could give men no explanation of the mysteries of life and death, and they could offer them no means of salvation and deliverance from their sins and the consequences. They could not claim a direct mission from God, or give men authoritative guidance. But this was what our Saviour Himself did. The central point of His work was that He came to establish the Kingdom

of God, the Kingdom in which God's rule was visible, to proclaim God's authority, the laws of that Kingdom, and to promise men that, if they submitted to Him and His Father in that Kingdom, He Himself would endure the consequences of their sins, and would make an expiation to His Father for them ; and that they would be finally delivered from sin and death. That was His message, and He fulfilled it to the death. Now that He had died, and risen into a supreme spiritual sphere, He established a Society of His followers to carry on that message ; and from that time there has existed in the world a Society which speaks in His Name, which conveys throughout the world His message, and which is charged to bring to bear on the whole life of mankind the authority of Christ and of God. That, and nothing less, is the function of the Church in the world.

It has created a most momentous change in the condition of human society, and it is the authority which is thus established which constitutes the essential nature of that change. The Church from the first was not, and has never been, simply an association of good men endeavouring to do what is right, and to induce others to do it. It is its essential feature that it comes before men bearing the authority of Christ and of God Himself, claiming their allegiance under penalty of His displeasure, and consequent judgment. The consequence has

been that, since our Lord spoke these words, there has always existed before the minds of men a clear and vivid standard of what is the will of God for our life, a standard of moral and spiritual perfection, which exerts an immense attraction upon honest and good hearts, and is a perpetual condemnation of evil. That standard is contained, first, in our Lord's own teaching, and then in the exposition of that teaching by His Apostles, and in the exhibition of character in the experience of the Christian Church. There is, of course, one great difference between the authority of our Lord and that of the Christian Church. He could speak from His own knowledge of what the will of God is. The Son of God, in the bosom of the Father, He was able to declare Him from direct vision of His Father's glory and will. The Church can only learn that will from the words of Christ, under the teaching and guidance of the Holy Spirit, whom our Lord sent unto them. That being so, the authority of the Church rests entirely on what she learns of Christ's will from His own words, and from the words of those who heard Him, and whom He specially inspired to understand Him. The authority of the Church therefore, rests on those Scriptures which are the one authentic record of the teaching of Christ and the Apostles ; and it is her duty and privilege to open those Scriptures, as Christ did, and mould men's thoughts and wills in accordance with them.

The grand thing is that there does exist a Society to which Christ has promised the continual aid of His Spirit, to bring to bear upon the world continuously, age after age, the Divine will, the Divine commands, the Divine ideal for all our life.

If these things are so, it is evident that the only hope for the world, and for human society, is to accept the standard thus revealed to it, to mould all its life in accordance with it, and to use to the full such means and agencies for the support of the highest moral and spiritual life, as Christ has established in His Church. The world is at this moment staggered by having before its eyes the spectacle of the consequences which follow from the rejection of this authority and guidance. An immense part of the world has broken away from Christ's authority, and repudiates the message which His Church brings from Him. The consequence is that all the bonds of society are dissolved, and the earth is "filled with violence." It is seen and acknowledged among us that the only hope of deliverance from this violence and confusion is to reassert the authority and the standard of Christ, and the Churches are loudly called upon to enter on a crusade for this purpose, or, in other words, to fulfil the mission with which He entrusted them on this solemn occasion. They ought to need no human call for that purpose. They carry the express commission of Christ Himself, to bring to

the world at large what He brought to it, to take up His work and discharge it in His Name. Alas ! in the course of ages the Church has been corrupted, and in consequence of this corruption has been divided, and she no longer speaks with that united voice and action which is essential for the full assertion of her authority. There are, happily, strong influences among us to remedy, at least in our own country, that division of voice and action ; and for the chief purposes of Christian life there is a practical union of Christian forces. But if we would fulfil Christ's command to the Church, we must rouse ourselves to far more earnest and resolute action ; and at all events, as individuals, we must do our part in exerting in our lives—in our families and in our public life—that action as Christ's deputies, which He here assigns to His Church at large. As I have said, the charge was addressed not merely to His Apostles, but to the whole Christian community, and every individual Christian has his part to play in fulfilling it. Let us pray for His grace to enable us to do so more than we have yet done.

XI

'THE GOSPEL OF REMISSION

“And when He had said this, He breathed on them, and saith unto them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost : whose soever sins ye forgive, they are forgiven unto them ; whose soever *sins* ye retain, they are retained.”—ST. JOHN xx. 22, 23.

XI

THE GOSPEL OF REMISSION

WE have considered how, in the first of the two great sentences which our Lord uttered to His Apostles and disciples when they were gathered together on the evening of the day of the Resurrection, He called into being the Church, which for the future was to be His representative, and His deputy, in the discharge of the mission to the world which His Father had given Him. "As My Father hath sent Me, even so," He said, "send I you." He then gave them a sacramental assurance that they would be granted the spiritual power necessary for the discharge of that momentous office. "When He had said this, He breathed on them, and saith unto them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost." It was a repetition of His experience at the commencement of His own ministry. That ministry started from His Baptism, and at His Baptism the heaven was opened, and the Holy Ghost descended in a bodily shape, like a dove, upon Him, and a Voice came from heaven, which said : "Thou art My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." Just so, with a

bodily sign, our Lord gave His disciples the assurance of that great gift which, fifty days afterwards, descended upon them, opening their understanding, and giving them new powers. They were bidden not to attempt to act until they had received that gift, but to wait in Jerusalem, "for the promise of the Father, which, saith He, ye have heard of Me." But, though they were thus to wait for a few weeks, our Lord accompanies His commission with the assurance that that gift would come ; and that as they were to carry forward His mission, so they would be endued with His own Spirit, the Spirit of the Father and of the Son. Without the assurance of that Spirit, the Church could not have dared to undertake "so great an office appointed for the salvation of mankind" ; and it is only so far as she submits herself to the impulse and guidance of this Spirit that she is able to fulfil that office.

But having thus created the Church, and assured it of the Breath of its spiritual life, our Lord proceeds in another great sentence to endow it with authority for the most precious of all its functions. "Whose soever sins ye forgive," He declares, "they are forgiven unto them ; and whose soever sins ye retain, they are retained." In those words our Saviour goes to the heart of the present condition of mankind, and to its central need. When all is said and done, when you have surveyed the whole

surface of human nature, and looked below the surface, you find that the supreme and cardinal fact respecting it is that of sin. It is sin in all its sorts and degrees—sometimes wilful and rebellious, more often, and indeed generally, the sin of weakness and inherited moral disease ; sometimes breaking out in great moral tragedies and disasters, but more often sapping the moral strength and dimming the moral insight ; at work, like some infectious poison, through the whole moral and mental organism, and rendering mankind generally maimed and enfeebled. St. Paul's vivid description of his own experience is certainly a description of human nature at large. “ I know that the law is spiritual, but I am carnal, sold under sin, for that which I do I know not : for what I would, that do I not.” “ I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) dwelleth no good thing : for to will is present with me ; but how to perform that which is good, I find not.” “ I delight in the law of God after the inward man ; but I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members ” (Rom. vii.).

Such are the realities of life. They are described with similar force and accuracy in the description in our Articles, of that original sin which is “ the fault and corruption of the nature of every man, . . . whereby man is very far gone from original righteousness, and is, of his own nature, inclined to

evil." That is the one great trouble of the world, and we confess it every day in our Common Prayer ; when we own, at every approach to God, that " we have gone astray like lost sheep ; that we have followed too much the devices and desires of our own hearts," that we have offended against God's holy laws, " that we have left undone those things that we ought to have done, and have done those things which we ought not to have done, and there is no health in us." If we were inclined to doubt it, the War we have just passed through, and the state of the world at the present time are enough to prove it. Men speak sometimes of those on whose heads the chief guilt of the War rests ; but does any one suppose that a dozen or two individuals are the only persons responsible for the War ? Must it not be acknowledged that a war like this, with all the horrors perpetrated in it, is due to the accumulation, through a generation or two, of ambitions, and passions, and habits of selfishness and faithlessness, among large classes in various nations, which at length end in a great explosion ? This is the great trouble of the world ; this is the cardinal evil which our Lord was sent into the world to remedy. I venture to think that if we could see the world of human nature in Europe as it really is, if our spiritual eye could look below the surface of society, we should see that its moral condition is too well illustrated by the number of maimed and

wounded men whom we daily meet as the sufferers from the War. In the battle of life with the powers of evil, "with the rulers of the darkness of this world," men and women suffer moral wounds and spiritual mutilations, which they carry about to the end of their lives; and few indeed are the happy saints who escape some such damage to their moral and spiritual powers. How can we help exclaiming with the Apostle who felt this weakness, even in his own person, "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?"—or rather, "this body of death."

It is, therefore, the supreme blessing of the Gospel that it brings an assurance of deliverance from this evil, and of forgiveness for the sins and infirmities which follow upon it. The individual soul craves for forgiveness for the share it has borne in these violations of God's will, and these injuries to its fellows, and it sees in nature no means of this forgiveness. Still less can it see in the natural order of things any remedy sufficient to purge the whole race of its poison. There is, in fact, only one source from which such forgiveness and such deliverance can come, and that source is the grace of God Himself. He who created is the only Power who can recreate; and He alone can remit to the penitent soul the punishment it has brought upon itself, and remedy its injury. The Scribes and Pharisees were perfectly right in their inquiry

“ Who can forgive sins but God alone ? ” Their error was only that they did not believe that the Saviour who pronounced forgiveness of sins was Himself God. It was necessary, therefore, if the supreme blessings of forgiveness and regeneration were to be proclaimed and assured to mankind, that the proclamation and the assurance should be guaranteed by the authority of God Himself, and it is this which constitutes the momentous and blessed character of this second sentence of our Lord on the Resurrection evening. By the sacrifice He had offered on the Cross He had made “ a full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice, oblation and satisfaction for the sins of the whole world,” and He could now commission His Church to proclaim that blessed and glorious news to all mankind. It could not be declared in its fulness until that expiation was complete ; and that is the reason, it may be well to observe in passing, why this declaration occupies a less prominent place in the Gospels than it does in the Epistles. Until the expiation had been made, until it had been seen at what an awful cost it had been won, until it could be shown that forgiveness of the sins of men was compatible with God’s justice, this supreme blessing could only be partially revealed. But now, when the sacrifice had been completed, and when its acceptance by God had been justified by the deliverance and exaltation of the Sufferer, the grand

proclamation could be made to the whole world ; and our Lord here gives authority to the Apostles to proclaim it. Forgiveness and deliverance from evil were henceforth to be offered to all men on the basis of Christ's sacrifice, and on conditions of due repentance and faith. Those conditions are, of course, assumed in this brief declaration ; but on that understanding our Lord gives His disciples full authority to publish this pardon and deliverance, and assures His Church that this promise to men will be ratified by God Himself : " Whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them ; and whose soever sins ye retain, they are retained."

Such is the grand culmination of the appearances and utterances of our Lord on the evening of His Resurrection, and it will be seen that this is another instance of the concentrated brevity of these sentences. It will be apparent that it is a grievous misapprehension of the words to apply them to the grant of any special power to the Apostles. As we have seen, our Lord was not speaking to the Apostles only. He was speaking to the Apostles and those that were with them, and to the Church itself, in fact, in germ ; and He is giving the indispensable guarantee of Divine authority to the most momentous element in the commission they would have to discharge in His Name. Of course, as the chief functions of the Christian Church, those of teaching, reproving, exhorting, administering the sacraments.

would always fall chiefly into the hands of the Apostles, so the message of absolution, the ministry of reconciliation, would inevitably fall chiefly into their hands. To them and their successors, falls in an eminent degree the fulfilment of the commission, "As My Father hath sent Me, even so send I you." But they act as representing the whole Church, and they have no special authority in themselves to forgive or retain sins. They can only declare and administer the commission which Christ gave to His Church at large, and apply its promises and its graces to individual sinners. It is for the Church, as a body, accordingly, to determine and prescribe the methods by which those graces shall be administered, and the best means by which they can be brought home to mankind at large.

It will now be seen that the meaning and the spirit of these two great sentences of the risen Saviour are explained in St. Luke's more detailed account of the substance of what our Lord said to the Eleven and their fellows. "These," He said unto them, "are the words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled, which are written in the Law of Moses, and in the Prophets, and in the Psalms concerning Me. Then opened He their mind, that they might understand the Scriptures; and He said unto them, Thus it is written, and thus it behoved

the Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day : and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His Name among all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. And ye are witnesses of these things. And, behold, I send forth the promise of My Father upon you : but tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem, until ye be endued with power from on high." That would seem to be a clear summary and explanation of the whole of our Lord's discourse that evening, beginning with the upbraiding, of which St. Mark speaks, for their failure to realise what had been declared by the Law and the Prophets, and had now been fulfilled in Him ; including the two cardinal statements which St. John selected, stating that they were to be His witnesses to all the world, and that repentance and remission of sins were to be the substance of their message. The two accounts, accordingly, seem to supplement each other ; and in combination they afford a grand conception of the Divine acts and words on that sacred and glorious day ; and so, after these meditations, may we not follow the example of the disciples, and return to our daily works and to our homes with great joy, praising and blessing God ?

XII

RECEPTION OF ST. THOMAS

" But Thomas, one of the twelve, called Didymus, was not with them when Jesus came. The other disciples therefore said unto him, We have seen the Lord. But he said unto them, Except I shall see in His hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe.

" And after eight days again His disciples were within, and Thomas with them. Jesus cometh, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst, and said, Peace *be* unto you. Then saith He to Thomas, Reach hither thy finger, and see My hands ; and reach *hither* thy hand, and put it into My side : and be not faithless, but believing. Thomas answered and said unto Him, My Lord and my God. Jesus saith unto him, Because thou hast seen Me, thou hast believed : blessed *are* they that have not seen, and *yet* have believed."—
ST. JOHN xx. 24-29.

XII

RECEPTION OF ST. THOMAS

WE last considered our Lord's first appearance to His assembled disciples after His appearances to the women and Peter, and to the two disciples at Emmaus, when He gave His Church—whom the Eleven and those that were with them represented—the solemn commission to proclaim the forgiveness of sins. It is remarkable that on that momentous occasion one of the Eleven, Thomas, was absent. There is no explanation of his absence, but it had the consequence of supplementing and strengthening in a very important manner the evidences of our Lord's Resurrection. The other disciples, of course, informed Thomas of our Lord's wonderful appearance, but he said unto them, " Except I see in His hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into His side, I will not believe." It ought to be observed, in the first place, that Thomas was not peculiar in this hesitation to accept the assurance of our Lord's re-appearance. It will be remembered that all the Apostles had

exhibited a similar disbelief. St. John tells us that when Mary Magdalene and Joanna, and Mary the mother of James, and other women that were with them returned from the sepulchre, and told all that they had seen to the Apostles, "their words seemed to them as idle tales, and they believed them not." St. Mark, indeed, tells us that at our Lord's first appearance to them in company, He "upbraided them for their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they believed not them which had seen Him after He was risen." It is a striking confirmation of the attitude of their minds in this respect that, as St. Luke tells us, our Lord found it necessary to offer them the very assurances which St. Thomas afterwards desired, in order to induce them to abandon their faithlessness. "They were terrified and affrighted at His appearance, and supposed that they had seen a spirit. And He said unto them, Why are ye troubled ? and why do reasonings arise in your hearts ? See My hands and My feet, that it is I Myself ; handle Me, and see ; for a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye behold Me having. And when He had said this, He showed them His hands and His feet." These are the very proofs that Thomas demanded, and even that was not enough. "While they yet disbelieved for joy, and wondered, He said unto them, Have ye here anything to eat ? And they gave Him a piece of a broiled fish, and He took it and did eat before them."

Not till then were their minds in a condition in which He could give them His great commission, to bear witness to His sufferings and to His Resurrection, and to preach repentance and remission of sins in His Name. It is evident, therefore, that St. Thomas's state of mind was that of all the Apostles until they had actually had opportunities, as St. John expresses it in his Epistle, to "see, hear, and handle" their beloved Master.

It is again important that this attitude of the Apostles and of those that were with Him should be borne in mind, in reference to some current objections to our belief in our Lord's Resurrection. It is frequently urged that the Apostles and Evangelists were prejudiced witnesses, because they were expecting our Lord's return to them; but these simple narratives prove that the case was exactly the opposite. They were so far from having any expectation of our Lord's Resurrection, that it required ocular and manual communication with Him to induce them to believe it. It was necessary for Him to upbraid them with their unbelief and hardness of heart, in not accepting the first reports of His appearance, which reached them from the women. St. Mark's words have been thought to convey a harder reproof than would have been natural from our Lord's lips, but they are precisely parallel to His expression to the two disciples at Emmaus, when He exclaimed

" O foolish men, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken ! Ought not the Christ to suffer these things, and to enter into His glory ? " St. John says of himself and St. Peter, " as yet they knew not the Scriptures, that He must rise again from the dead." Their unbelief was in spite of His own repeated statement that, after being crucified, He would rise again from the dead ; but both the one and the other event was incredible to them before it had happened. They were absolutely prostrated by the Crucifixion, in spite of what He had repeatedly told them, and His promise of His Resurrection had made no impression whatever on their minds.

This indisposition to believe, and even to realise, these two events, is not perhaps unnatural. That the Lord, whose powers, as well as whose truth and goodness, they had realised during their life with Him, could be rejected, condemned, and put to death with ignominy by His own people, could hardly be otherwise than incredible to them. It was inconsistent with all their thoughts of Him, and all their experiences of Him ; and we ought to bear this in mind when we contemplate their desertion of Him, and St. Peter's denial. It seemed to show that all their beliefs respecting Him, and all their hopes, were delusive, and it produced a complete convulsion in their minds. It is scarcely possible for us to put ourselves into their position. To us, our Lord in all His humiliation bears the

character with which He now lives for us—the glorified and ascended Lord, Who has overcome death and all evil ; and it seems incredible faithlessness that He should be deserted and disbelieved. But, except at His Transfiguration, none of His disciples had seen Him in this glory ; and His apparent weakness in the presence of the rulers and the Jews was a tremendous shock to them. As the Evangelist says, when He told them of His approaching death and resurrection, “ they understood not this saying and it was hid from them ” ; “ they perceived it not, and they failed to ask Him of that saying.” It was not merely Thomas, therefore, but all the disciples who were hard to convince of the wondrous fact of our Lord having risen from the dead.

That, also, was not an unnatural incredulity, for no such thing had ever occurred before. Men had been raised from the dead, but it had been by the authority and solemn act of One who spoke by Divine authority ; as when our Lord raised Lazarus ; but that a man who had been put to death should afterwards have risen of Himself had never been dreamed of. Our Lord’s gracious exhibition to His disciples of His hands and His feet, and Thomas’s claim to see the print of the nails and put his fingers into the print of the nails, and thrust His hand into His side, indicate another consideration that must have made belief harder

to them. Resurrection from an ordinary death, such as that of Lazarus, where the body was not harmed, was more conceivable ; but that a body which had undergone the terrible mutilation of the scourging, the piercings by the nails and the spear, the most violent death that could be conceived—that such a body should have risen from the dead, after three days, may well have seemed inconceivable to them. It is a similar difficulty which is no doubt felt by men who look at the matter from a scientific point of view in our own day—men who realise the physical meaning of death, and all that is physically involved in its reversal. When such difficulties are felt, it is of the highest value to realise that all those difficulties were felt, in all their practical force, not merely by St. Thomas, but more or less by all the Apostles ; and that it was not until our Saviour had condescended to afford them the most positive proof of the reality of His return to life—not only by ocular, but by all other practical evidence—that they were induced to believe.

All this, however, was brought out with peculiar force in the special case of St. Thomas. His case was not in substance different from that of the Apostles, but it presents the same difficulties in a more vivid and conclusive manner. His sayings in the Gospel indicate that he was in possession of a very deep devotion to our Lord ; and with a peculiar capacity for realising what we call hard

facts. His exclamation when our Lord stated His resolve to visit Lazarus in Judæa, is a clear indication of his character. His disciples had warned Him of the danger of going there. "Master," they said, "the Jews of late sought to stone Thee, and goest Thou thither again?" But when our Lord, nevertheless, said, "Let us go unto him," then saith Thomas to his fellow disciples, "Let us also go that we may die with Him." He saw clearly that, in the present temper of the Jewish authorities, our Lord was probably going to death. Nevertheless, he is resolved to go with Him, and summons his fellow disciples to the same devotion. It is a similarly firm and clear perception which prompts his question to our Lord at the opening of His last discourses. "Whither I go," our Lord had said, "ye know, and the way ye know. Thomas saith unto Him, Lord, we know not whither Thou goest, and how can we know the way?" That is a matter-of-fact question, and our Lord answered it not less directly: "I am the Way." In order, therefore, to do justice to the apparently hard saying of Thomas, and of his subsequent confession, we should regard him as moved by two impulses: One, an intense devotion to his Master, and proportionate grief and dismay at His Crucifixion; the other, a peculiarly clear and strong perception of the physical difficulties of His restoration to life. The one circumstance

which aggravates his disbelief is his refusal to accept the testimony of his brother disciples. In that he showed himself—to use our Lord's expression—"slow of heart to believe." He showed himself like those of whom it is said that "they knew not the Scripture, neither the power of God." Nevertheless, it was an aggravated form of the difficulty which all the disciples had felt, and our Lord's merciful judgment of it is shown by the grace with which He met it.

He appears again when the disciples are assembled and Thomas is with them, and He at once addresses him; but He does not upbraid him as He had done the others. He does not begin with any words of reproach, but simply offers him the evidence He had been asked for. "Peace be unto you," He says to all of them, and then He says to Thomas, "Reach hither thy finger and see My hands; and reach hither thy hand, and put it into My side: and be not faithless, but believing." The strict translation would be "Become not faithless, but become believing"—abandon your unbelieving disposition and be of a believing mind. Thomas's instant response to this gracious invitation bespeaks the earnestness and eagerness of the man. There is no indication that he required the actual test which his first demand literally implied. It is not said that he accepted our Lord's invitation to touch with his finger and his hand the

wounds in our Lord's body. He yields at once, with the exclamation, "My Lord and my God." It will be observed that he goes at once beyond the mere acceptance of the reality of our Lord's Resurrection. It seems like a reaction from his incredulous state of mind that he bursts through all hesitations respecting our Lord's claims, and realises that he is in the presence not only of his risen Master, but of his "Lord and his God." It is perhaps another instance, of many in the Gospels, of the manner in which one word, or one look, from our Lord may suffice to pierce straight to the heart of men and women, and compel their instant allegiance. Was it something Divine in the look, the word, the tone that broke through all obstacles and penetrated to the depth of men's souls ? Something of that must have been the case when Nathanael exclaimed at the very outset of His ministry after a brief exchange of words, "Rabbi, Thou art the Son of God ; Thou art the King of Israel." In the strained atmosphere of that assembly of disciples, when they all felt themselves in a supernatural Presence, the gracious words of our Lord, spoken in a tone of silent rebuke, naturally went to the very heart of the Apostle, and he broke down into that absolute acceptance of his Lord and his God. It is a momentous confession, not merely because it was forced from an Apostle who was so hard to convince, but because it was at once

accepted by our Lord. He is addressed not only as Lord, but as God, and He does not refuse the appellation. It was a supremely solemn thing for a Jew to address any one as "God" and an equally solemn thing for our Lord to accept it. It is the last word of Christian faith ; it is the conclusion of those signs and manifestations which St. John had recorded, and it is the final vindication of his opening words. "The Word was God" are in the opening sentences of his Gospel ; "My Lord and my God" are its conclusion. The purpose of his Gospel was fulfilled. "These things are written that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing ye might have life through His Name."

Our Lord's reply has been justly characterised as the final beatitude. "Thomas, because thou hast seen Me, thou hast believed : blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed." He does not say that they are more blessed, but simply says that they are blessed. No matter how the belief is produced, whether by the sort of ocular and physical demonstration which Thomas enjoyed, or by the mere strength of faith, the whole blessing of the Gospel is theirs. He is not referring to the other disciples ; they, too, had believed because they had seen. It is a word of gracious and precious promise to all those who ever since have believed in Him through their word. Since their

time, no one except St. Paul has been granted the privilege of seeing the Lord. They have had to rest upon the assurance of those who did see, and hear, and handle Him, combined with the testimony of the Scriptures, and the practical experience of the Church and of all true believers. They have experienced His grace in their hearts. They have been assisted, in hours of temptation and sorrow, by His Spirit. Their spirits have answered to His words as recorded in the Gospels, and brought home to them by His Apostles' teaching, and they are blessed in that faith, and in the assurance it gives them of His forgiveness and His love. The proof that Thomas and the Apostles desired we cannot have ; and, in its absence, we must cherish this assurance of our Saviour, "Blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed." The accumulated experiences of the Christian Church afford a corroboration scarcely inferior to that of actual sight ; and we may be sure that the same blessing is upon us, as that which He gave to His assembled followers.

XIII

BEATITUDE OF BELIEF

“ Jesus saith unto him, Because thou hast seen Me, thou hast believed : blessed *are* they that have not seen, and *yet* have believed.”
—ST. JOHN xx. 29.

XIII

BEATITUDE OF BELIEF

WE observed that these words of our Lord, in reply to the confession of St. Thomas, did not apply to any of those whom He was addressing. All the disciples then present had seen Him. He had vouchsafed to them the very evidence which St. Thomas had required ; He had shown them His hands and His feet ; He had bidden them handle Him, and see that He was not a mere spirit, but a Spirit that had flesh and bones as they saw He had. They saw with their eyes, and realised through their own senses, that though our Lord's body had different capacities from that earthly body in which they had known Him before His death, it was nevertheless identical with it, to such an extent that it bore the marks of the very wounds which had been inflicted on it in His Crucifixion. This, it may be well to observe in passing, is a very significant, and a very precious, indication of the nature of the body in which we all hope to be clothed—we ourselves, and all dear to us—after our own resurrection at the last day. There is,

St. Paul reveals to us, a natural body and there is a spiritual body, and it is natural for us to inquire anxiously whether that spiritual body will have sufficient in common with our present natural body to enable us to be in communion with those whom we have known here. The appearance of our Lord's spiritual body seems conclusive on that point. It was not merely similar in general character to His earthly body, but it even retained the special scars which had been stamped upon it during His Passion. There is thus a justification for that hymn which speaks of the rapture in which we may hereafter gaze upon "those glorious scars." While we are assured by St. Paul that "as we have borne the image of the earthy, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly," we may also confidently conclude that in the future life the very features which are most characteristic of our friends and ourselves in this life will be sufficiently retained to assure us of the continuance of our personal communion with one another. All the manifestations of our Lord recorded for us in these last two chapters of St. John's Gospel are of the same character in this respect. Our Lord's person could be shrouded from observation whenever He pleased ; but whenever, in St. John's phrase, He "manifested Himself," He appeared as "that same Jesus" whom the Apostles had known in the days of His earthly fellowship. To those who can

believe what they have not seen, this simple fact is surely worth a thousandfold more than any impalpable communications with the spirits of the dead for which some restless souls are straining. All those experiments are repetitions of the spirit of Thomas, which will not believe unless it can see or feel ; and the best comment on them is the saying, “Blessed are they who have not seen, and yet have believed.” Blessed and more comforted are they who are content with the manifestations of the risen Lord, and with the assurances of His Apostles, and who accordingly believe in the spiritual life of those whom they have lost, and in their future reunion and personal communion with them.

But our Lord’s words seem to look much further than these questions of personal life and death, and to point to the great principle of Christian life. He knew that He was soon to disappear from the world, that His Ascension into Heaven was approaching ; and that, after that, it would not be the will of His Father and Himself that He should manifest Himself visibly to His servants, even in the greatest crises of His Church. There is, indeed, good reason to believe that in hours of the agony of His saints a vision of Him has been vouchsafed to them, like that which was granted to St. Stephen who, at the moment of his death, “looking up stedfastly into heaven, saw the glory of God and Jesus standing

at the right hand of God." But such gracious visions have not been manifestations like those we are considering, open to others as well as to the Saint himself—seen, and heard, and handled. Our Lord knew that the Church He was founding would have to live and grow without any of those sensible and palpable evidences, with which He was at that time graciously convincing His Apostles of the reality of His Resurrection, and laying in their minds firm foundations for their future testimony. The whole Church was to be built upon their testimony ; and it was therefore natural, and even imperative, that they should be vouchsafed nothing less than unmistakable proofs of the cardinal truths of which they had to bear witness. Our Lord did not ask them to go into all the world and give a witness of a resurrection of which they had not personal and sensible experience ; He knew that the whole Church hereafter was to be built upon faith in their testimony, and that all Christians to the end of time would have to live by belief in that which they had not seen ; and it is therefore peculiarly impressive and touching that, in this final beatitude He gave us all the assurance of being blessed in that prolonged act of faith.

We may, indeed, well observe that He was thus making a call upon the faith of mankind which might have been impracticable, but for two things

by which it was accompanied. In the first place, His two Sacraments, and especially the Supper of the Lord, constituted to all time a vivid witness, stamped with His personal authority, to the truths which the Apostles were to proclaim. It is, of course, a most imperfect conception of the nature of that sacred ordinance to regard it as a mere Act of Remembrance. That is an imperfect view of it which our Church positively condemns: but it would none the less be well if that aspect of it were always kept vividly before our minds. Our Catechism teaches us that it was ordained "for the continual remembrance of the sacrifice of the death of Christ, and of the benefits which we receive thereby." It seems important to bear in mind that there is one act, and only one, in the whole history of the world, which is remembered and rehearsed every day over the whole face of the world, and that is the institution of the sacred Supper by our Lord on the eve of His death. Every Sunday, nay almost every day—not only in Cathedrals like this—the Minister performs the acts which Christ performed, and uses the solemn words which Christ used, in remembrance of His Death and Passion. It is a tremendous thought to those who are ministering in this office, that they are repeating the very acts and words of the Saviour Himself. They are doing it as a witness of the sacrifice which He made on the Cross, and of the benefits which He

promised by means of that sacrifice to all people. From hand to hand, from voice to voice, from generation to generation, those witnesses of the Saviour's death and of His continued life, and of forgiveness of sins, and of eternal life bestowed upon us, have been repeated "as pledges of His love and for a continued remembrance of His death, to our great and endless comfort." That is a voice from Himself—an echo from His own lips, and a sign from His own hands; and its preciousness, as a perpetual assurance for our faith, is unspeakable. He did not merely give solemn promises generations ago, but He gives them now, every day, by visible signs which He Himself appointed; and His ministers exhibit them to His people by His command, and as His representatives. Though we do not see the print of the nails, nor the wound in His side, we do, by a visible representation, see the Blood that was shed, and the Body that was broken, and hear His very words in our ears. That witness alone—the establishment of that Sacrament, affords a vivid approach to that very sight and touch which it was not unnatural for the Apostles to ask for as assurance of so great a mystery as His resurrection to a new life.

But there was one other influence which our Saviour had in view, in leaving His Church to live for the future on the belief of things which they had

not seen and could not see ; and that influence was the gift of the Holy Spirit. Within a few weeks after His departure from the world at His Ascension, a new and supreme influence was introduced into the world, in that gift of the Holy Spirit, in a degree in which He had not previously been acting in it. His special work in the world before is revealed to us in those monuments of His inspiration, which are preserved to us in the Scriptures of the Old Testament. The Law, and the Prophets, and the Psalms are the product of a spiritual influence superior to any which the human spirit has exhibited elsewhere. They are the results of the working of a Divine Spirit upon the spirits of men ; but it was an influence granted only to chosen men for special purposes, and was not the privilege of the people at large. But the foundation of the Christian Church depends upon the grant to all alike—all peoples, men, women, and children—of a special Divine influence to quicken their consciences, to deepen their spiritual perception, and to transform their souls. It is this Divine Gift which alone explains the life of the Church through all the vicissitudes of its stormy career. It can hardly be supposed that the gracious and tender plants of Christian love and life could have come down unharmed through the violences of persecutions, the barbarisms of wild races, and corruptions of civilisation, had they depended merely upon the

faith and devotion of even the greatest of its representatives. Such representatives have themselves been the last to claim that success : but it is all explained when we realise that our Lord's promise was fulfilled, and that immediately after His Ascension, a holy Spirit—the Spirit of the Father and the Son—entered upon a course of action upon the spirits of men, which quickened their spiritual sense, which brought home to them the words and deeds of our Lord with vivifying power, which was like a wind which perpetually cleared the moral and spiritual air in which they lived, and brought airs of heaven to purify their hearts. Without influence of this kind, mere testimony, however strong, might have been insufficient to sustain men's faith—at least it would have involved a severe trial for them ; but when our Lord called for faith from those who had not seen and could not see, He gave them these supreme and gracious influences to support and strengthen them.

But with these supports and sustaining influences, we can realise the truth of our Lord's beatitude, "Blessed are they who have not seen, and yet have believed." Like the earlier beatitudes, it is a blessing both in the present and in the future. The words embody the most essential characteristic of Christian life, that it is a life of faith, lived in the belief of things not seen, and realising the substance of things only hoped for.

It is the privilege of the Christian to look upon all things in the light which this world cannot supply, and to believe respecting them what there can be no sensible proof of. This is the case, for instance, respecting the whole government and constitution of the world, and has been recently brought painfully home to us in our experiences of the Great War. Many hearts have been racked and strained with the feeling that they could not see nor hear God amidst those grievous scenes of bloodshed and misery. There are, indeed, minds which believe that they have seen His hand there, not merely in marvellous interpositions and mercies, but in the purification which the war was working out in the life and character of modern society. But such convictions cannot be brought to the test of visible demonstration ; and there are hours and circumstances of overwhelming strain, in which God may seem to almost all men to be hidden. In the stress of such trials and convulsions, it is not by sight and visible experience that men can retain their assurance of God's presence and action. It can only be by faith : and the characteristic of the Christian is to live by that faith, to echo the exclamation, " Though He slay me, yet will I put my trust in Him," and to stay his soul upon the assurances which he had learned to believe at the mouth of our Lord and His Apostles, in which he believes that he hears the very word of God.

Faith, indeed, in its highest and strongest form is the response of the soul to promises and words of God, spoken either by the Son of God or by His messengers and ministers, and it is those words—words of the Psalms or the Gospels, or of the Apostles—upon which the Christian rests amidst all the apparent confusion and contradictions of life. It is the same with our private experiences and sorrows. There are sufferings in this life of which no visible explanation can be found. We see around us diseases, distresses, pain and sorrow, for which no adequate reason is apparent. Sorrows and sufferings and bereavements fall upon the good as upon the evil, and there are hours when men and women find it hard to maintain their trust and their hope amidst such trials. But it is the privilege of the Christian to fall back on simple faith, resting on the promises and assurances of God, echoed by generations of sufferers, through Psalms and Epistles and Songs of the Church; to believe, though he cannot see it, that all his experiences are under the guidance and control of a God of all goodness, and that though he cannot see His gracious hand, it is always with him. In the grand language of our Service for the Visitation of the Sick, “Dearly beloved, know this, that Almighty God is the Lord of life and death, and of all things to them pertaining, as youth, strength, health, age, weakness, and sickness. Wherefore,

whatsoever your sickness is, know you certainly that it is God's visitation. And for what cause so ever this sickness is sent unto you . . . know you certainly, that if you truly repent you of your sins, and bear your sickness patiently, trusting in God's mercy, for His dear Son Jesus Christ's sake, and render unto Him humble thanks for His Fatherly visitation, submitting yourself wholly unto His will, it shall turn to your profit, and help you forward in the right way that leadeth unto everlasting life."

That is a practical illustration, for which there is daily need among us, of believing that which we have not seen, and which even seems inconsistent with our experience. But here also by many a bedside, and in many a sorrow, you may see fulfilled the beatitude of the risen Saviour, "Blessed are they who have not seen, and yet have believed." In that assurance is sorrow comforted, and pain patiently endured, and in that strength are men able to face all the keenest trials of life. God grant that we ourselves, through the gracious influences of His Spirit, and fortified, in a good and ancient phrase, "by the sacraments of the Church," which are those of Christ, may thus realise, in life and in death, the blessing of those who have not seen, and yet have believed.

XIV

ON THE LAKE OF TIBERIAS

*"Jesus saith unto him, If I will that he tarry till I come, what is
that to thee ? follow thou Me."*—ST. JOHN xxi. 22.

XIV

ON THE LAKE OF TIBERIAS

THE twenty-first chapter of St. John possesses a unique interest among the narratives of our Lord's appearances after His Resurrection. It is clearly a sort of Postscript or Appendix to the Gospel itself. The last verse of the twentieth chapter was obviously written as a conclusion to the whole Gospel. "There are many other signs," it says, "which Jesus did in the presence of the disciples, . . . but these are written that ye may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing ye might have life through His Name." That verse seems to say that St. John considered that he had written enough to convince men that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of God ; and his Gospel must be regarded as complete for that purpose ; but he was afterwards induced to add, in this chapter, some personal reminiscences not necessary for his main purpose. It is probable they were prompted by some incidents which had occurred at the close of his long life ; and it is not improbable these are indicated by the statement

at the close that "this saying went abroad among the brethren that that disciple should not die"; and that he wished to put in its true light the words of our Lord to him, out of which that impression had arisen. But, at all events, what is recorded in this chapter is of peculiarly personal interest, independent of the general manifestation of our Lord to His Apostles. It gives us a glimpse of the relation of our Lord to His disciples during the forty days which preceded His Ascension. We are told, in the first chapter of the Acts, that "He showed Himself alive after His Passion by many infallible proofs, appearing unto them by the space of forty days"; and St. Peter, in his address to Cornelius, says that He was made manifest, "not to all the people, but to witnesses chosen before of God, even to us who did eat and drink with Him after He rose from the dead." This chapter has a special value as an illustration of that statement, giving us an account of one of those occasions when our Lord mixed with His disciples in ordinary intercourse, and not in solemn assembly, as in the cases we have already considered.

Those forty days must, indeed, have been a period of strange anxiety to His disciples. Our Lord's solemn manifestations to them in their assemblies had convinced them of the new life upon which He had entered, and had told them of the great Commission which had been entrusted

to them ; but they were for the time, as it were, held back from any action, until the promise had been fulfilled to them, of the nature of which they could form no sufficient conception. They were bidden to "wait for the promise of the Father, which, said He, ye have heard of Me." It was in Jerusalem that they were to expect the fulfilment of that promise ; but, meanwhile, as appears from this twenty-first chapter, many of them returned to their homes, and resumed their former occupations. Of those who were gathered together on the occasion of this incident, Peter and the two sons of Zebedee had been fishermen on the Sea of Galilee when our Lord called them to follow Him. At His call they had left their occupation, that He might make them fishers of men ; and now, while waiting for the fulfilment of that assurance, they had returned to their old home and their old work. On one of those days, Peter, here, as always, taking the initiative, said : "I go a-fishing," and the others said, "We also go with thee," and, as the original implies, they went out of the house and followed him. They were simply, it is evident, at their ordinary occupation, and they passed the night fishing, and caught nothing. They were simply waiting in their usual way of life, until our Lord's further directions were given them. This alone, I think, gives us a picture, which is of extreme interest, of the life of the Apostles

and disciples during those momentous days of patience.

But it was interrupted by one of those interviews with our Lord of which St. Peter spoke to Cornelius. When day was breaking, Jesus was standing on the beach. They did not know that it was Jesus ; and as they were busy with their work as fishermen, it was natural that they should take no notice of Him ; but He addressed them with the kindly appellation, "Children"—not a term of relationship, but of some superiority—"have ye aught to eat ?" meaning, of course, had they caught anything to eat ? Even then, they failed to recognise Him, and simply answered, "No," being, no doubt, still engrossed in their work ; but He went on to say, "Cast the net on the right side of the boat, and ye shall find. They cast, therefore, and now they were not able to draw it for the multitude of fishes." Then one of the sons of Zebedee—the disciple whom Jesus had specially loved—realised who had spoken to them, and said to Peter, "It is the Lord." No doubt, the quick insight of love enabled him to recognise his Lord the moment he really beheld Him ; but there was another circumstance which must have quickened his observation, as well as St. Peter's. It must have recalled to them both the memorable incident of St. Peter's final call, as recorded in the fifth chapter of St. Luke. You will remember how, on that occasion, after speaking

to the people from Simon's boat, He had said to him, "Launch out into the deep, and let down your nets for a draught," and Simon answered and said to Him, "Master, we have toiled all night and have taken nothing. Nevertheless at Thy word, I will let down the net. And when they had this done they enclosed a great multitude of fishes, and their net brake . . . and when Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord: for he was astonished, and all they that were with him, at the draught of fishes which they had taken; and so were also James and John, the sons of Zebedee, who were partners with Simon." It was a precisely similar incident to this one, though there are several marked differences to refute the suggestion which has been made, that the later incident was a mere reminiscence of the earlier one. But here, at the very spot where the marvellous draught of fishes had prompted Peter to recognise our Lord's Divinity, a similar miracle revealed to him that he was in the Presence of the same Lord.

With his usual impetuosity of feeling, Peter instantly threw his garment over him and threw himself into the sea, which no doubt, was shallow, as the boats were in speaking distance of the land, leaving his fellows to drag the boats and the net to the shore. But no immediate interchange of thought passed between them; and the other

fishermen, when they came to land, found a fire of charcoal ready, and fish laid on it, and a loaf ; and Jesus bade them bring of the fish which they had caught. Simon Peter obeys Him, and rejoins his fellows, and draws the net to land full of great fishes, one hundred and fifty and three. Jesus then bids them all come and break their fast, and they partake of a meal together. Jesus took the loaf and gave it to them, and the fish likewise. That, too, was like a repetition of days when He had fed a multitude with the two loaves and a few fishes. They were in too much awe to make any inquiry of Him, or to ask Him, “ Who art Thou ? knowing it was the Lord.” It would seem as though He had intended, by this simple action, to make them realise that He was still that same Jesus who had been with Peter in old days on the sea, when he was a fisherman only ; and when He had met the ordinary needs of His disciples and followers on the hillsides of the Lake. That, it would seem, was enough, and was the first purpose of this manifestation of Himself. It proved to them that His Resurrection, and the transformation of His body which had followed it, had not separated Him from their ordinary life and experience. It must have brought home to them, with singular clearness, His saying, when they were assembled together, “ It is I Myself.” St. Peter’s expression to Cornelius that, “ He did eat and drink with us after He rose

from the dead," is evidently intended to convey the same impression. If He could eat and drink with them as He did in former days, they would be assured that He was the very Lord with whom they had lived, although He had passed through death and the grave, and had resumed a glorified existence.

It may be, if we think carefully of it, that there may be some similar lesson to be conveyed to ourselves from such an incident. It is an assurance to ourselves that, though our Lord is hidden from us, as He was during most of those forty days from His disciples, yet He is none the less in human sympathy with us ; that we are not to think of Him as removed entirely from the sphere of our human nature, and our ordinary life and experiences, but that we can still think of Him and speak of Him as a Man, still in touch with us through His human nature, though exalted far above us. In our Lord's other manifestations, except this, at the tomb, to the women, He speaks from a spiritual exaltation ; but here He reveals Himself as still possessing those touches of nature, which enable us to feel that He is still akin to us.

But when they had broken their fast, after their long night of labour, our Lord proceeds to turn the occasion to a solemn personal purpose. Simon Peter had shown once more his eager devotion by his dashing into the sea, and his recognition of

our Lord. We can well believe that his heart was full of the sorrow and shame which his denial of his Lord had caused him, and that he was longing for further signs of his Master's forgiveness. That, indeed, had been already given in the interview which our Lord had granted him after His Resurrection ; but it may well be that his wound was not yet fully healed, and that he was longing for more and more assurance of his Lord's forgiveness and love. It would seem, from the narrative, that he was somewhat checked in his eager approach to our Lord from the ship ; and that no special greeting passed between them at the first moment. On the contrary, when our Lord bade the disciples bring of the fish that they had taken, Peter turns to that duty, and helped to draw the net to land.

But when their meal was over, our Lord turned to Peter, and addressed him specially. "Simon, son of John," He said, "lovest thou Me more than these ?" It was a question which must have cut Peter to the heart. It reminded him that he had claimed such devotion to our Lord over all the other disciples. He had said at the Last Supper, "though all men shall be offended, yet will not I," and again that evening, "Why cannot I follow Thee now ? I will lay down my life for Thy sake" ; and yet, though he had not been the only one to desert our Lord at the last, he had more flagrantly denied Him than had any of the others. The full

bitterness of that moment is recalled by that question, "Lovest thou Me more than these?" There is a note of humiliation in Peter's reply. The old self-confidence is quite gone, and he cannot trust himself to his own independent assertion. "Yea, Lord," He says, "Thou knowest that I love Thee." Our Lord's question intimates a doubt, or seems to suggest a doubt to his own mind, and though he says, "Yea, Lord," he appeals for our Lord's own corroboration of his assurance. "Yea, Lord, Thou knowest that I love Thee." That he loves Him more than others he does not presume to say. Our Lord silently accepts the assurance, and gives him the best proof of His acceptance of it, by replying simply, "Feed My lambs." "If ye love Me," He had said in His last discourse, "keep My commandments"; and He gives Peter this charge to be fulfilled as a proof of his love. But a second time, and a third time, our Lord asks the same disconcerting question, "Simon, son of John, lovest thou Me?" At the third question, Peter could not refrain from showing that he was hurt, and he answers with a certain note of impatience, "Lord, Thou knowest all things. Thou knowest that I love Thee"; and Jesus again accepts the assurance, and gives him a similar charge as a proof of it. "Tend My sheep"; but He goes on to warn him that he will be called upon to prove that love in the severest possible trial. "Verily

verily, I say unto thee, when thou wast young, thou girdedst thyself, and walkedst whither thou wouldest ; but when thou shalt be old, thou shalt stretch forth thy hands, and another shall gird thee, and carry thee whither thou wouldest not. Now, this He spake, signifying by what death he should glorify God," namely, by crucifixion ; and we know that St. Peter did not fail in that hour of supreme trial.

It has been observed that two words are used in the original for the love which our Saviour asked, and which St. Peter declares ; but the only point which would seem clear about those two expressions is that together they express the two chief forms which love can assume ; that of personal love, and that of the deep love of the whole nature of which St. Paul speaks in his great chapter on love or charity. Whatever love can mean—the love of the heart, of the mind, or of the very depths of the soul—our Lord asks of Peter, and all this Peter avows, and our Lord acknowledges. But however this may be, it is of supreme instruction to observe that it is love and nothing else, and not devotion only, which our Lord craves for. St. Peter was convinced that our Lord was the Christ, the Son of God ; his mind was convinced of it ; he thought he was prepared to stake his life upon it ; but it did not follow that he was bound to our Lord by the supreme tie of love. But it is love which is

the real bond which alone can unite men to one another in indissoluble devotion. It may well be, therefore, that our Lord is touching a fibre which needed to be strengthened in Peter's nature, in asking—not, Wilt thou follow Me? not—Wilt thou die for Me? both of which Peter had declared he would do—but, Dost thou love Me? That was the supreme essential, and it would become henceforth the conscious motive of Peter's life. With respect to the beloved disciple, between whom and our Lord that bond had long been fixed, no explanation and no test was necessary. Peter asked what would become of him, but our Lord is contented to reply, “If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee? Do thou follow Me.” Let that be our own motto. These appearances and sayings of our Lord, though they reveal much for our comfort and illumination, necessarily leave much mysterious and uncertain, alike for our own lives and for those of others. But the last word of the Saviour in these conversations is a sufficient guide to our lives, “Follow thou Me.” May He give us grace to do so more and more.

XV

ASSEMBLY IN GALILEE

“ But the eleven disciples went into Galilee, unto the mountain where Jesus had appointed them. And when they saw Him, they worshipped *Him*: but some doubted. And Jesus came to them and spake unto them, saying, All authority hath been given unto Me in heaven and on earth. Go ye therefore, and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I commanded you: and lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world.”—ST. MATTHEW xxviii. 16–20.

XV

ASSEMBLY IN GALILEE

THIS passage describes the last appearance of our Lord to His disciples before the meeting in Jerusalem at which He led them out to Bethany, and ascended into Heaven. It was a meeting held by His express appointment, as St. Matthew mentions in this chapter, in his account of the Angels' direction to the women. " Go quickly," the Angels said to them, " and tell His disciples that He is risen from the dead ; and, behold, He goeth before you into Galilee ; there shall ye see Him." Accordingly, as we have seen, some of the Apostles were on the Lake of Tiberias a few days after His appearance to St. Thomas. There is good reason to believe, moreover, that this direction to meet Him in Galilee was not understood to be confined to the Apostles. For them it would not have been necessary, as they had seen Him in Jerusalem ; but many other disciples assembled on that occasion. This is, in fact, to be regarded as the occasion mentioned by St. Paul, in his fifteenth chapter to the Corinthians, when He appeared to above five hundred brethren at

once. It was thus our Lord's solemn manifestation of Himself to the whole body of His disciples, and, accordingly, He makes it the occasion for a final and comprehensive declaration of His own office, and of their commission. We are told that "when they saw Him, they worshipped Him: but some doubted." This is the first occasion on which it is mentioned that our Lord's disciples worshipped Him. It was an expression of the conviction to which Thomas had given utterance in his exclamation, "My Lord and my God." The statement that "some doubted" is explained by the presence of hundreds of disciples who had not had the privilege of those personal interviews with Him, which had been vouchsafed to the Eleven, and who would naturally be affected at first by the same perplexity which the Eleven themselves had experienced when our Lord first appeared. The mention of this hesitation on the part of some of the assembly is not only a mark of the narration of an eye-witness, but an instance of the scrupulous accuracy of the Evangelist, and it gives a reality and naturalness to the scene. But our Lord speaks to them as to one body of believers and as a representative gathering of all His followers.

Accordingly, in these two verses we find the whole commission of the Church of Christ stated with a comprehensiveness and a depth, which are eminently fitted for such an occasion. It will be

found to sum up with a marvellous completeness the whole revelation of the Gospel. Our Lord begins by a solemn declaration of His own position and office. "All power"—or all authority, He says, "hath been given unto Me in Heaven and on earth." That is the first grand truth of the Gospel, from which everything else springs. St. Paul states it in touching words, as a result of our Lord's humiliation of Himself in life and in death. "Being found in fashion as a man, He humbled Himself, becoming obedient unto death, even the death of the Cross. Wherefore also God hath highly exalted Him, and hath given Him the Name which is above every name, that at the Name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in Heaven and things on earth, and things under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father."

This supreme fact is now formally acknowledged by all who accept the Christian Faith ; but it may be doubted whether it is practically realised by us as it ought to be. It makes the whole of our life subject to His control and order. It requires this alike in our private and in our public lives ; not merely in the Church but in the State. In the whole order of our existence, the supreme question is whether we are living in accordance with the will of Christ as revealed to us in His words, and by His Ministers and Apostles. It has recently been

questioned whether it is legally true that Christianity is a part of the law of England ; but at all events, under this declaration of our Lord, it ought to be a part of the legislation of England and of the British Empire, and we may at least be sure that any laws, and any legislative orders, which are inconsistent with His will, must sooner or later break down, and be punished by some mischievous consequences. It is with this single declaration that Christianity confronts all other religions and all moral philosophies. “There is but one God, and Mahomet is His prophet,” is the summary of the great religion which confronts us in so large a part of our own dominions. “There is but one God, and Jesus Christ is His Prophet and Representative,” is similarly the brief summary of the Christian Creed. Our Lord confronts the whole world with this tremendous claim—to possess all authority in heaven and on earth. If we fully realised it, our life would be lived in absolute subordination to Him.

But, with this supreme authority, He proceeds to give a commission to His Apostles and to the Church. “Go ye,” He proceeds, “and teach all nations”—or, rather, “make disciples of all the nations.” That is the first inevitable consequence of our Lord’s universal authority. The well-known verse of the Psalm is its immediate consequence : “Tell it out among the heathen, that the

Lord is King, and that He shall judge the people righteously.” But our Lord’s commission goes further than that verse of the Psalm. The Jews could tell it out among the heathen that the Lord is King, but they thought that they were in a peculiar sense the people of God, and the thought of all nations being joined with them in acknowledging Him, and as part of His people, was beyond their conception. But the message of the Gospel, thus proclaimed by our Lord, is one and the same to all nations. They are all alike to be brought to acknowledge our Lord’s authority, and to become His disciples.

The Church is bidden to baptise them in—or rather into—the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. The difference of meaning between the words “in” and “into,” is of the highest importance. The word “in” might only mean that the Apostles and Christian Ministers were acting in the name and by the authority of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Ghost. But to baptise *into* the Name implies bringing them into communion with the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, making them participate in the whole life and influence of those Three Persons. It should particularly be observed, accordingly, that though this commission is rightly regarded, as the solemn institution of Baptism, to be the introduction to the Christian Church and Christian life, yet it carries

with it a far deeper meaning. It implies that all nations, all people on the face of the earth, were to be introduced to all the Divine influences which are exerted by the Father, by the Son, and by the Holy Ghost. They are not only to be brought to live under the Fatherly care and love of God, but they are to be given all the blessings which were won for them by the Son in His great work of redemption. More especially, as our Lord expressly stated on other occasions, are repentance and remission of sins to be preached in His Name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. The special and characteristic message of the Gospel is repentance and remission of sins. To produce that repentance, and to grant that remission of sins, was the special work of the Son of God ; and to baptise men into His Name, is, in a peculiar degree, to call men to that repentance, and to assure them of that remission. There are many discussions in the present day as to what Christianity is, but they are too apt to leave out of sight its relation to this cardinal need of human nature. It is the only religion in the world which at once recognises sin as the chief and universal misery of human nature, and offers a remedy for it, and forgiveness for the sinner. “I believe”—so we are privileged to confess in the Creed of our Communion Office—“I believe in one baptism for the remission of sins.” Baptism in the Name of Christ offers the

grand promise of Christ to every soul that its sins are forgiven, if only it repent of them and long to be delivered from them. That is the supreme value of that sacrament. It is not a mere admission into the Society of the Church. It stands, like the rainbow in the heavens, as a visible sign from Christ Himself, that He offers repentance and remission of sins to all nations and all people. Next to our belief that Christ is endued with all authority in Heaven and earth, the most essential characteristic of the Christian Creed is that we believe in the remission of sins, as testified by that Baptism which Christ instituted.

But all nations are to be baptised also into the Holy Ghost. That is to say, they are to be admitted into the influence of that Life-giving Spirit, who is one with the Father and the Son, and who is sent by Them—by the Father, through the Son's ministry—and by virtue of His sacrifice to regenerate the very nature of men, to bring them into union with the Father and the Son, to make them sons of God, capable of being heirs of Eternal Life. In their life here they are gradually brought into more and more harmony with the will of the Father and the Son, and their very bodies will hereafter be transformed under His spiritual influence. Such is the Baptism which our Lord commissioned His Church to convey to all nations. The phrase is not infrequently used that we have in this verse the

institution of the baptismal formula ; but it is no formula, it is a vivid expression of a momentous reality. It is the brief but momentous statement that Christ instituted Baptism as a witness to every soul of man, that they are invited to accept union with the Divine life of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. It is not a sort of magic formula. It is the most comprehensive summary of Christian realities which is anywhere to be found. If you wish, in the last resort, to express what being a Christian means you can only express it fully in this way : It is being admitted into union with—and in that sense baptised into the Name of—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost. That includes everything, as no other expression does.

The depth of this truth may be illustrated by another consideration, which has been raised by modern criticism. It has been asked whether this phrase, “in the Name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost,” does not bear the marks of having been introduced at a later period in the Church’s history, when what we call the Doctrine of the Trinity had been formulated, and that it is unlikely that a phrase which seems to echo that doctrine should have been employed by our Lord long before it had been formally established. I would, however, suggest that the case is precisely the opposite. In those later days of the Church, when the sacred words had become a matter of acute controversy,

it might well have seemed inappropriate that they should be used by our Lord to express summarily and simply the essence of the Christian commission. But when our Lord used those words, their meaning was not obscured by those unhappy controversies. They expressed, in His mouth, the simple but supreme realities which He had taught, and which He had brought home to men by His life and death. "The Father" had been the first and last words on His sacred lips. "Wist ye not," He had said, as a child, "that I must be about My Father's business?" "Father," was His last word on the Cross, "into Thy hands I commend My spirit." The whole of His teaching is a revelation of the Father. "He that hath seen Me," He said, "hath seen the Father," and His whole life and His very death were the one perfect revelation of Him. But that involves also the revelation of the Son. In revealing the Father, He revealed the Son. His whole life was a life of Sonship, and He showed that it meant doing His Father's will, even in agony and in death. The Father and Son together stand out as the great revelation of the Gospels. You see them there in their relation to one another, and in their relation to man. You see the holiness, the grace, the truth which are the essential Divine characteristics, and you see that men are intended to share them. As an ecclesiastical formula, that saying, "Baptise them into the

name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost," might seem inadequate to so solemn and supreme an occasion, but as a commission to baptise men into all the heights and depths of the Divine relations, into "the love of God and the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit," they contain in one sentence the grandest commission and revelation that even the Scriptures afford—they bear stamped on their very face the seal, not of an ecclesiastical formula, but of the Saviour of the world.

There follows, as a necessary consequence, "teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you." We have these commands very fully and practically in the Gospels; but we are told in the Acts of the Apostles that, during the forty days before our Lord's Ascension, He gave commands unto the Apostles whom He had chosen, and that "He spake with them of the things concerning the Kingdom of God." It is to be borne in mind that there were some things concerning that Kingdom of which our Lord could not speak until after His death and Resurrection. The meaning and the message of that death and Resurrection could not be fully realised until after they had happened. The Apostles could not even believe beforehand that they were going to happen. As the Evangelist says, these realities were hidden from them, and they perceived them not. In this

momentous aspect, therefore, the Acts and the Epistles are the indispensable supplement to the Gospels, giving us information respecting the truths of our Faith, and the will of our Lord, which are an essential part of His revelation to us. It is a gracious completion of the revelation of the Gospel to us that the Holy Spirit inspired some of the Apostles and their followers to preserve to us a record of their actual preaching, in pursuance of these commands of our Lord, and a sufficient account of the Church which He established through them.

But this is the rule and foundation of the Christian life: "to observe all things, whatsoever was commanded by the Lord, to Whom all power and authority is given in Heaven and in earth." It is a gracious but an arduous commission, and our Lord mercifully completes it by a promise which gives us the encouragement we need. "Lo," He adds, as His last words, "I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world." He does not send His Apostles and their successors out into the world by themselves, to carry out, as best they may, by their own unaided powers, the immense work of making disciples of all nations, of bringing them into the Divine communion, and of teaching them to observe whatsoever He had commanded them. He promises that He will be with them always, even to the end. We may look for His hand, therefore,

in the whole course of the history of the Church in the past, sustaining its life and the purity of the Gospel light, amidst all the confusions which His sinning and erring followers have brought into it ; and, for our comfort, we may be assured that His hand is with us now, amidst the grievous confusions and difficulties of our own times. The Church of this day has to deal with new problems, larger and more complex in their character than ever before. It is a momentous and an arduous task to maintain, before the whole world, obedience to all the things that Christ commanded us ; but we are not asking men to be baptised into the name of a Father, a Son, and a Holy Ghost, who are far above us in a distant and inaccessible sphere ; we are surrounded by their supreme and gracious influence here ; and the Son, in whom all authority rests, and through whom the Spirit proceeds, assures us that He is with us still. That is the final message of the risen Saviour, and, in reliance on it, we may meet the difficulties and the duties before us in peace and hope.

XVI

THE SUMMARY COMMISSION

" And He said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the Gospel to the whole creation. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved ; but he that disbelieveth shall be condemned. And these signs shall follow them that believe : in My name shall they cast out devils ; they shall speak with new tongues ; they shall take up serpents, and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall in no wise hurt them ; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover.

" So then the Lord Jesus, after He had spoken unto them, was received up into heaven, and sat down at the right hand of God. And they went forth, and preached everywhere, the Lord working with them, and confirming the word by the signs that followed Amen."—ST. MARK xvi. 15-20.

XVI

THE SUMMARY COMMISSION

IN these meditations we have now considered the final commission of our Lord to His disciples assembled in Galilee, containing in brief words the grand summary of the Gospel. "All authority," He said, "is given unto Me in heaven and on earth. Go ye, therefore, and teach all nations, baptising them into the Name of the Father and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost; teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you; and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world." Let us pass to consider the verses I have read from St. Mark, which are evidently a brief account of the same commission, with some additions, very characteristic of St. Mark. Critical questions, indeed, have been raised as to whether these verses were written by St. Mark himself; but they are quoted by the earliest Christian writers as forming part of the Gospel; and as no doubt was raised about them for the first three centuries, we need have no hesitation in accepting them as part of the inspired narrative. It will be seen as

we proceed, how singularly their substance is in harmony with the character of St. Mark's Gospel. The whole message which the Apostles are to preach, as stated by St. Mark, is here condensed into one sentence, "Preach the Gospel to the whole creation." The bestowal upon our Lord of all authority in heaven and earth, the revelation of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, and the call on men to submit themselves in baptism to the gracious influences of those three Divine Persons, is condensed into the one word "Preach the Gospel." It is worth observation, as a singular example of the harmony of these verses with the style of St. Mark, that he is the only one of the four Evangelists who thus uses the word "Gospel" to express the whole message of our Lord. The other Evangelists speak of the Gospel of the Kingdom of God, or the Gospel of God, but never simply of the Gospel; but St. Mark uses it five times, beginning with the brief account of the commencement of our Lord's ministry, in the first chapter, where we read that our Lord came into Galilee, saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand: repent ye, and believe the Gospel." It will be enough to quote one other instance from the account of the woman who poured ointment on our Lord's head. "Wheresoever this Gospel shall be preached throughout the whole world, this also that she hath done shall be spoken of for a memorial of her."

It is instructive, also, to bear in mind that this is the true meaning of the word “Gospel.” We are in danger of losing sight of it by our habit of speaking of the Gospel of St. Matthew or St. Mark, as though it were a book ; but, it really means the contents of each of those books, the whole of that revelation of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost, and of Their relations to mankind—“the love of God, the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the fellowship of the Holy Ghost,” which are revealed and recorded in those four books. This is “The Gospel”—the blessed news—which the Apostles are charged to preach. St. Matthew’s expression is different, “unto all the nations,” doubtless, because he goes on to speak of teaching and commanding them ; but St. Mark’s expression involves this, and indicates a still wider scope of the blessings of the Gospel. It is the very word used by St. Paul in that memorable passage in the Epistle to the Romans, in which he says that, “The whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now,” waiting “for the manifestation of the sons of God,” and that “the creation itself shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God.” The use of the word seems another touch of St. Mark’s own ; he uses it thrice, the other Evangelists not once. St. Paul, again, in the first chapter of the Epistle to the Colossians, repeats this

assurance, speaking of "the Gospel which was preached in all creation." "The expression," says Bishop Lightfoot, "must not be limited to men." The statement is given in the broadest form. "All creation, animate and inanimate, being included"; so, in the Book of the Revelation of St. John, "Every creature which is in heaven, and on the earth, and under the earth, and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, heard I saying, Blessing, and honour, and glory, and power, be unto Him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever." Such, as recorded by this Evangelist, is the grand promise with which our Saviour arose from the dead. The whole world, and not only human nature, is passing through a long period of travail, but it is under the control and guidance of His power and authority, and it will end in a new birth of all things, "into the glorious liberty of the children of God." He that sitteth on the throne saith, "Behold, I make all things new."

But St. Mark's summary passes from the whole creation to men, and its relation to them is again concentrated in one sentence, "He that believeth and is baptised shall be saved," and, "He that believeth not shall be condemned." The word "damned," in our Authorised Version, conveys to our ears too strong an expression, as it seems to imply the most extreme sentence of condemnation.

The word is the same as that used by St. Paul when he says that, " thou that judgest another condemnest thyself." What may be the ultimate sentence passed on all those who do not believe the Gospel, and who are thus condemned, will be sure to be a merciful as well as a just one, at the hands of a God of all mercy and justice and love. But this does not alter the broad fact that, when the Gospel reaches a man, it must be to him a message either of salvation or of condemnation. If he believes it, if accordingly he accepts baptism into the Name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, if he thus declares his belief and trust in those Almighty and gracious Persons, if in consequence he gives himself up to them in body and soul, for life and for death, he has the blessed assurance that he will be saved—saved from all the evil and sin with which he is surrounded and burdened ; forgiven for Christ's sake, and brought at length into the glorious liberty of the sons of God. The Gospel is essentially and primarily a Gospel of Salvation. Our Lord was announced as One " Who should save His people from their sins," and all the evil which sin implies ; and the man who so believes Him as to trust Him entirely, and give himself up to Him, has found the only source of salvation from evil which exists in the world. It will depend on the degree of his belief, on the extent to which he fulfils the promise of his baptism, on the earnestness

of his prayers, the completeness of his self-surrender to his Saviour, how far he realises here the salvation which is offered to him. But let him only believe with all his heart the messages and the promises of the Saviour, and it cannot but be that he will be saved. That he is baptised is mentioned, not as an additional requirement to his belief, but as a natural consequence. If he believed he would be baptised, for, as St. Paul says, "With the heart man believeth unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation"; and St. Paul adds, "Whosoever believeth in Him shall not be ashamed"; for Christ will never fail them that trust Him. It is in the very spirit of this Gospel that St. Mark proceeds to mention the signs of salvation which shall follow those that believe. The Gospel of St. Mark is pre-eminently a Gospel of miracles, of the salvation which our Lord wrought, when He was upon earth, on the bodies and souls of men and women. Those signs continued after His death, as we read in the Acts of the Apostles, and in the Epistles, and in the earliest Christian writings. They were performed as signs, as visible evidences of the saving power of our Lord, until such visible evidence was no longer indispensable; but they remain as the evidence of what salvation means—deliverance from all the evils by which our nature is afflicted.

But the contrast is inevitable. "He that

believeth not shall be condemned." There are minds, perhaps, to which this sentence sounds harsh ; but the least reflection will show that if the Gospel be what it claims to be, this result is inevitable. In the first place, a man who believeth not, has turned his back on the only source of salvation there is in the universe. Christ, in His final words, is declaring that all authority and all power is given to Him. He is Himself the only possible Saviour, the only Person from whom pardon can be obtained for offences against His will and His laws, the only Person who can make all things new, in the life of the individual soul, and in the life of the world at large. The loss which a man suffers from not believing the Gospel is thus not an arbitrary penalty, but an inevitable consequence. Because he that believeth shall be saved, it follows that he that believeth not shall not be saved. But at the same time it must be recognised that it is not a mere natural consequence which is expressed in this sentence. It is a sentence of blame and reprobation. It says not merely that the man shall suffer, but that he shall be condemned ; he will be pronounced guilty of an offence. It is this element of the statement in which men are apt to find a stumbling-block. In what, they say, does the moral offence consist in not believing the Gospel ? It may be an error and a misfortune, it may involve disastrous consequences, but why

should a man be condemned for it ? The reply to this too natural inquiry turns on the meaning of the word "believe," in the Scriptures. In our common language, we frequently use it as meaning little more than an opinion. "I believe that such a thing happened," or, "I believe such a statement." It means often little more than "I think so : that is my opinion." But the belief spoken of in the Scriptures, and particularly in the New Testament, means something very different from an opinion or doubt. It means above all things, trust in a Person. When St. Paul said to the jailer at Philippi, "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved," we must at once realise that he meant much more than "believe something about the Lord Jesus." He obviously calls on the jailer to trust that Lord, and to put himself under His protection by doing so. So, when the Ministers of Christ proclaim to the sinner, or to the dying man, forgiveness and salvation if he believes in Jesus Christ, he is calling upon him, not merely to believe certain truths, but to trust Jesus Christ personally as his Saviour, to repent of having offended Him, and to resolve to do so no more. And if the sinner, or the dying man, should ask, Why should I believe this ? the answer must be, Because Jesus Christ has said so, because He has made this promise, and I invite you to believe that promise, and act on the faith of it, and all that it

involves. Christian faith comes in the end to be belief and trust in the words of Jesus Christ, in His promise and His assurance. In asking a man, therefore, to believe the Gospel we are not asking him to form an opinion on an alleged truth, on some abstract scheme, for instance, which we call Christianity, we are asking him to listen to the words and promises of the Lord Jesus Christ and to believe Him.

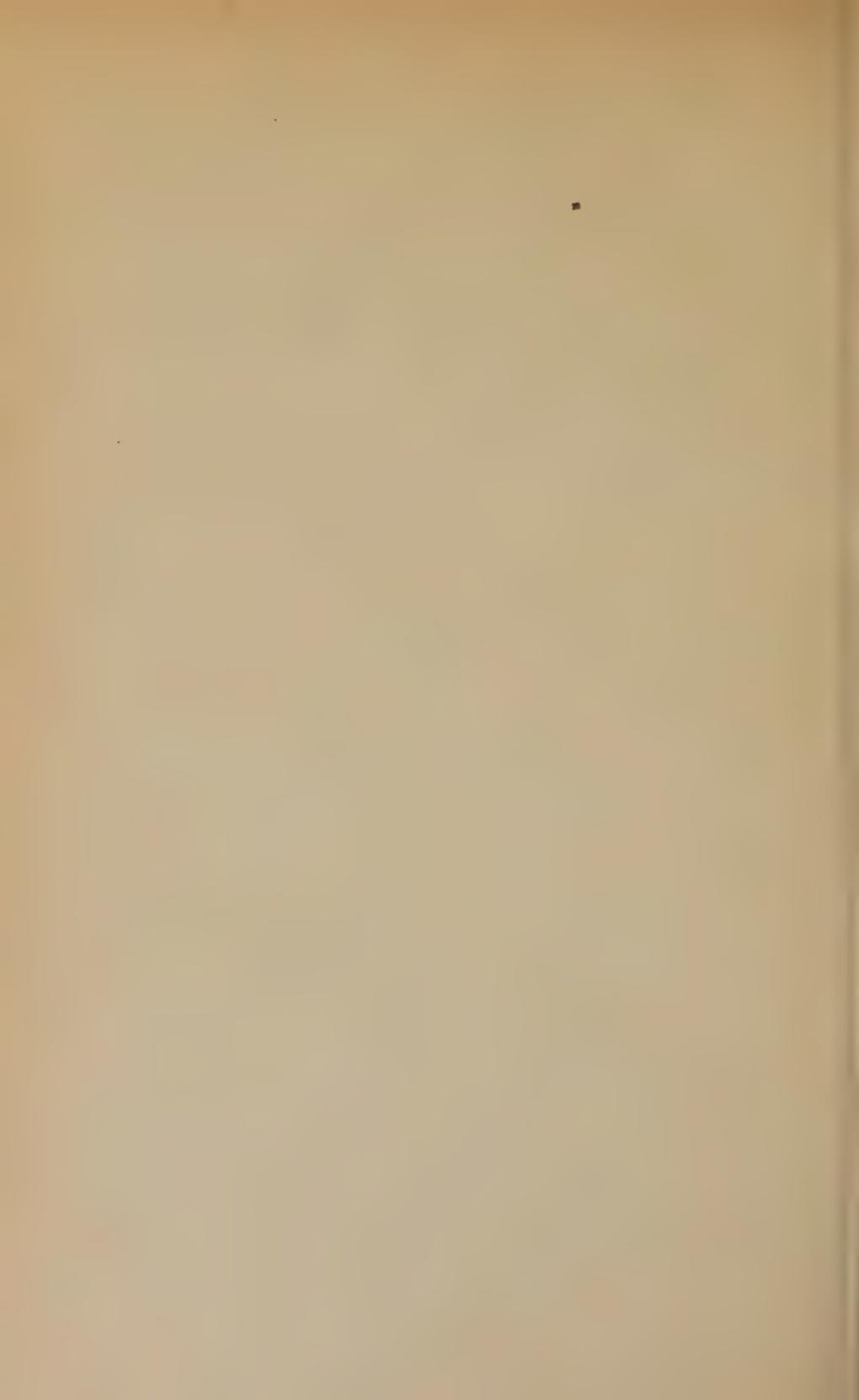
But this involves a moral test. If Jesus Christ speaks the truth of God, then we may be sure that persons whose hearts are in harmony with that truth will realise that He is speaking the truth, and will believe Him. "If I say the truth," said our Lord, "why do ye not believe Me? He that is of God heareth God's words. Ye therefore hear them not because ye are not of God." In the life of this world, true men appreciate one another. The question of belief in the Gospel is thus the simple question of belief in Jesus Christ. The religious and theosophical world was never more full of argument and speculation and discussion as to the truth of Christianity; but the beginning and middle and end of the question is this: conceive yourself standing face to face with Jesus Christ speaking to you as He spoke in the Gospels, and are you able to say to Him, "I do not believe you"? That is what is involved in disbelief of the Gospel. It is a conclusion from which I think

men naturally shrink ; and the more they listen to His words, and realise His character, the more they shrink from it, and the more do their hearts turn towards Him. In fact, the very essence of the Gospel, as St. Paul says, is to transform our whole life into a life of trust and faith in God and our Lord Jesus Christ. We cease, as Christians, to be living in a world of mere laws and natural forces. We live in the Personal Presence of God and of our Lord Jesus Christ, and of Their Spirit, and we are asked in all we do to trust Them and follow Them. Our life grows, as St. Paul says, "from faith to faith." As faith grows stronger, love grows deeper, and life grows truer. In this personal faith lies all salvation. The Saviour loves those who love Him. We have His promise, "If a man love Me, My Father will love Him, and We will come unto him and make Our abode with him." The whole position of men and women since the Gospel has been preached to them is summed up in this sentence, "He that believeth and is baptised shall be saved ; and he that believeth not shall be condemned."

Thus, when the deeper meaning of its terms is considered, does this short conclusion of St. Mark's Gospel sum up all its heights and depths. The discussions about its authorship have been prolonged and perplexing, and have served too much to divert attention from its meaning ; but it is, at all events, a worthy and characteristic close to a Gospel of

which the first words are, “The beginning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ the Son of God.” It is in harmony with that beginning that its last words should be, “Go ye into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptised shall be saved, and he that believeth not shall be condemned.”

N.B.—On the authorship of the concluding verses of St. Mark, see p. 7 of this volume.



XVII

**THE GOSPEL AND THE
SCRIPTURES**

"And He said unto them, These are My words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, how that all things must needs be fulfilled, which are written in the Law of Moses, and the Prophets, and the Psalms, concerning Me. Then opened He their mind, that they might understand the Scriptures."—**St. LUKE xxiv. 44, 45.**

XVII

THE GOSPEL AND THE SCRIPTURES

THE concluding verses of St. Matthew and St. Mark record the great commission of our Lord to His disciples at the assembly in Galilee to which He had summoned them, and they may be the last previous to the time of His Ascension of which we have a separate account. It might indeed be thought, at first, that the verses from St. Luke which I have just read, contain words uttered only on the occasion which they immediately follow, when our Lord had appeared to the Eleven, and "showed them His hands and His feet, and did eat before them." But this first impression is modified by comparing the close of this Gospel with the commencement of the Acts of the Apostles. These two books are unquestionably by the same author, St. Luke. Both are addressed to the same person, Theophilus, and the second begins by proclaiming the authorship of the first. "The former treatise," it says, "have I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach, until the day in which He was received up, after that He had given commandment through the Holy Ghost unto the Apostles whom He had chosen, to whom also He

showed Himself alive after His Passion by many infallible proofs, appearing unto them by the space of forty days, and speaking the things concerning the Kingdom of God." The Book of the Acts, accordingly, begins by telling us all the circumstances of the Ascension, and it records, as having been spoken then, some of the very words at the close of St. Luke's Gospel, saying that the Apostles should be witnesses to Him, that He would send the promise of His Father upon them, and that they were to tarry in the city of Jerusalem. We may, therefore, regard these verses of St. Luke as including some of our Lord's words before His Ascension, followed only by His last answer to the Apostles, recorded in the Acts. The Acts, in fact, tell us that during the forty days He spoke to the Apostles of the things concerning the Kingdom of God, and these verses tell us some of His words at the close of that time. They were evidently spoken at Jerusalem in a final interview with His Apostles there, for St. Luke immediately adds, "and He led them out until they were over against Bethany," that is to say the side of the Mount of Olives against Bethany, and from the Mount of Olives He ascended. That passage to the Mount of Olives must have had an extraordinary interest for them. The last time He had led them through Jerusalem to the Mount of Olives was the night about forty days before, when "after they had sung an hymn" they

went out to Gethsemane, and the Passion of our Lord began. Now He led them along the same path to the glory of His Ascension. He had passed through a bitter Passion, and they through days of intense trial and temptation ; but His victory over sin and death had been won, and they were accompanying their Master and Lord to the kingdom and the glory which they had always believed was destined for Him.

What, then, was the substance of His discourse to them in these supreme and final hours ? “ He said unto them, These are the words which I spake unto you while I was yet with you, that all things must needs be fulfilled, which are written in the Law of Moses, and in the Prophets, and the Psalms concerning Me. Then opened He their mind, that they might understand the Scriptures.” When we read in the Acts that our Lord was seen of the disciples forty days, and spoke of the things concerning the Kingdom of God, we cannot but wonder with the deepest interest what those things were. There may have been many things of which we find the results conveyed to us in the Epistles of His Apostles. It has been thought that He may have given them instructions respecting the foundations of His Church ; but the words thus recorded by St. Luke, as spoken at the close of that period, may be regarded as indicating and summing up the most important of His teaching during that

time ; and they are concerned with the Scriptures of the Old Testament, and their relation to our Lord's life and death and Resurrection. He opened their mind that they might understand those Scriptures. We cannot but ask, with the deepest interest, why our Lord should thus concentrate the thoughts of the Apostles on this subject in those momentous hours, and make it the subject of His final instruction to them. We may, perhaps, see something of the reason if we consider the duty which was immediately before the Apostles. He charged them to be His witnesses, and to preach His message unto all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. Their first witness, therefore, was to be borne to the Jews. It is remarkable that this should have been the subject of a special injunction, for they were Jews themselves, living among Jews, and it might have seemed obvious that their preaching should be first directed to their brethren and neighbours. But the Jews at Jerusalem had exhibited such deadly hostility to our Lord and His teaching, that they might well have shrunk from attempting to renew His appeal or at least to press it, unless they had received special instructions and encouragement to do so. St. John tells us that, at the beginning of the day of the Resurrection, "the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled for fear of the Jews" ; and such fear was natural, as their Master had been crucified. We find them, moreover,

as described in the Acts, at once persecuted, both by the Jewish authorities and by Herod, the king. They were, in fact, before long scattered by the persecution in which Stephen was put to death. But it is an illustration of the infinite mercy of our Saviour, and of God's gracious purpose for His ancient people, that our Lord makes special provision that these very Jews should be the first to hear the full Gospel preached to them, after it had been completed by the death which they had inflicted on Him, and the Resurrection which ought to have convinced them of their sin and their folly. "Let Christ," as they had taunted Him, "come down from the Cross, that we may see and believe." He had then more than come down from the Cross, He had risen from the grave, but they would neither see nor believe. Nevertheless, St. Peter was inspired on the day of Pentecost to make that moving appeal to the very men who had murdered his Master; and in obedience to this injunction of our Lord, even after James had been put to death by Herod, they continued, at the peril of their lives, to proclaim the Gospel to their Jewish brethren.

But let us now observe what was the great difficulty they had to meet in the minds of the Jews. It is exhibited in its full force in the case of St. Stephen. The charge against him was, "This man ceaseth not to speak words against this holy place, and the law: for we have heard him

say, that this Jesus of Nazareth shall destroy this place, and shall change the customs which Moses delivered unto us." Though that was a false witness, it was one of those deadly falsehoods which are half the truth. The Jewish dispensation, as it then existed, was to pass away, to make room for the purer spiritual worship which our Lord would establish. The Jewish sacrifices were to come to an end, because the real sacrifice, of which they were only typical, had been made ; and our Lord had Himself spoken to the Samaritan woman of "the time when neither in this mountain nor in Jerusalem will men worship the Father," and when "the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth." But the souls of the Jews—and of the best Jews, like St. Paul when he was called Saul—were absolutely centred in one conviction, that the Law of Moses, and the Jewish worship, had been instituted by God Himself ; and they were right, and our Saviour acknowledged that they were right. "One jot," He had said, "and one tittle shall in no wise pass from the Law, until all be fulfilled." A message, therefore, which implied in any degree that it was to be abrogated, seemed to them nothing less than gross blasphemy ; and it was not only the High Priests, in their envy and malice, but a sincere Jew like Saul, who, as is said in the Acts, "breathed out threatenings and slaughter" against the disciples of the Lord. It

was this deadly obstacle in the Jewish mind which had to be overcome ; and it is evident there was only one way of overcoming it, and that was by showing that the Jews misunderstood the Scriptures on which their prejudices were founded. They did not look behind the bare letter of the Law. They did not see, as St. Paul was brought to see—partly, no doubt by the teaching of the very man, St. Stephen, whom he had helped to murder—that the Law all though pointed to a spirit above it, and that it could never be fulfilled in the mere letter. The answer to these prejudices was given by our Lord at the very outset of His ministry. He foresaw, from the very first, that His teaching would be thus misunderstood, and at the beginning of the Sermon on the Mount, He declared, “ Think not that I am come to destroy the Law and the Prophets. I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil.” The observance of the letter of the Mosaic institutions might cease, the Temple itself might pass away, but the spirit of those institutions, the spiritual worship for which that Temple was intended, would be realised in perfection. If the Gospel was to be brought home to the Jews, that was the truth respecting the Scriptures which it was imperative for them to be taught.

The momentous position which the Scriptures thus occupied in the convictions of the Jews is shown by a remarkable fact, which was placed in

its true light by an eminent predecessor of mine as Dean of Canterbury, Dr. Lyall, in a very valuable book on prophecy, called *Propædeia Prophetica*. He observes that in the Epistles of the Apostles, in the Acts of the Apostles, in the addresses of St. Peter and St. Paul, it is not upon the miracles of our Lord that the chief stress of the argument is laid. Those are taken for granted. "Ye know," says St. Peter to Cornelius, "how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power; who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil; for God was with Him." That was common knowledge. But all those works of power and mercy had failed to win the faith of the Jewish rulers and people. That upon which St. Peter finally relies is that "to Him give all the prophets witness, that through His Name whosoever believeth in Him shall receive remission of sins." So we are taught by St. Paul, in his opening address in his first missionary sermon. He is preaching in a synagogue: those whom he addresses are "men of Israel and ye that fear God," and after a brief summary of our Lord's life and death, he proceeds, "We bring you good tidings of the promise made unto the fathers, how God hath fulfilled the same unto us their children, in that He raised up Jesus, as also it is written in the second Psalm"; and then he confirms his appeal by other Psalms. It is the same in St. Paul's

Epistle to the Romans. His argument with the Jews is an appeal to the Scriptures, to the Psalms, and to Isaiah.

A familiar instance of the manner in which the souls of the Jews were saturated, as it were, with the memories and the promises of their past history is brought home to us in our daily service in the Song of Zacharias: "Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for He hath visited and redeemed His people, and hath raised up a mighty salvation for us, in the House of His servant David . . . to proclaim the mercy promised to our forefathers, and to remember His holy covenant ; to perform the oath which He sware to our fore-father, Abraham." How could it be otherwise, even from a mere human point of view ? How could a Jew fail to cherish as his most precious possession that wonderful history, stretching back about the same length of time as our own—about two thousand years—and filled with noble characters, which have furnished ideals to all subsequent generations. From Abraham the friend of God, Joseph, Moses, David, and Solomon, to the grand succession of Prophets, and all the heroes of faith whose deeds are celebrated in the Epistle to the Hebrews, with the prophecies and Psalms which aroused and sustained their faith, and which have inspired the life of the Christian Church for nearly two thousand years since our Lord's time,—how

could they listen to a message which seemed to nullify these glorious histories and hopes ? And when they were further convinced that it was the Lord of heaven and earth by whom these heroes had been inspired, and these promises given, how could they endure for a moment a message which would disregard and almost abolish them ?

I cannot but remark, in passing, that this intense devotion of the Jews to their ancient history and their ancient Scriptures, the intensity with which they clung to the memories of the great men of the past, and the words of Psalmists and Prophets ; their fury at the mere suggestion that these could be over-ridden, seem to render incredible the modern theories, which involve an assumption that the whole ancient history of the nation was forgotten during the short period of the exile, and that Ezra and his comrades persuaded the Jews of their day to accept an account of the first thousand years of their history which was the reverse of the reality. But at all events, if we bear these things in mind, we shall realise how natural it was, how exactly in accordance with the needs of the Apostles at that moment, that our Lord's last words to them before His Ascension should be concerned with those Scriptures, which would at once hold so momentous a place in their preaching to the Jews. Never was it so necessary, as at that moment, that He should open their minds that they might understand the

Scriptures, that they should realise how, from first to last, they had pointed to Himself, and should understand how in all things—His life, and death, and Resurrection—He had fulfilled and not destroyed them. Nothing seems more interesting, or more confirmative of our trust in these narratives of the Passion and Resurrection, than to observe how perfectly in harmony all the incidents and the sayings are with the facts and circumstances of the occasion. When we meditate upon it, there appears no greater instance of this harmony with realities than that our Lord's last words on earth should be concerned with the Scriptures. Must it not be a lesson to ourselves, never so much needed perhaps as at this time, to value and to study those Scriptures with a deeper and more prayerful interest ? If it was essential for the Apostles to understand them, to trace the hand of God throughout them, to see His will in the whole history, and in the whole course of prophecy, to learn from them the nature of the Saviour's mission, and the message of His life and death, it must be of the most profound interest and importance to ourselves. We may thankfully remember that, though He Himself is no longer with us to teach us by His own words, as He taught the Apostles, we possess in their Epistles the substance of His instructions, and He has promised His Spirit to take of the things of Christ and to show them to us.

XVIII

THE CHURCH'S MESSAGE

"Then opened He their mind, that they might understand the Scriptures ; and He said unto them, Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer, and rise again from the dead the third day ; and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His Name unto all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem. Ye are witnesses of these things."—ST. LUKE xxiv. 45-48.

XVIII

THE CHURCH'S MESSAGE

OUR previous considerations should have served to illustrate the reasons for our Lord's last instruction to His disciples in Jerusalem before His Ascension, impressing on them the importance of the words He had often spoken to them before, how that all things must needs be fulfilled which are written in the Law of Moses, in the Prophets, and the Psalms, concerning Him. They were, in the first instance, to preach to the Jews, and the Jews could accept nothing which was not founded on the revelations already given by God, contained in their Sacred Books ; and therefore He opened their understanding that they might understand those Scriptures. But our Lord went further, and indicated the main principles in the Scriptures which it was essential for them to understand. " Thus it is written," He said, " and thus it behoved the Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day : and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His Name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem." In this plain statement our Lord

concentrated the whole substance of the Apostles' preaching, and it contains the very essence of the Gospel.

Let us consider the last point first, as that to which the two first are directed. The final object of His Commission to the Apostles is that repentance and remission of sins should be preached to all nations. That is the last word of our Lord's message, as it was the first. His forerunner, the Baptist, came, as St. Mark says, to preach "the Baptism of repentance unto remission of sins"; and our Lord then came into Galilee, "preaching the Gospel of God, and saying, The time is fulfilled, and the Kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe in the Gospel." Or, as St. Matthew says, "From that time began Jesus to preach, and to say, Repent ye: for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand," and the Kingdom of Heaven brought with it not only all the obligations, but all the powers and graces of the Kingdom.

I would ask you to consider whether we duly realise the light which is thrown upon the condition of human nature by this first and last proclamation of our Lord. It is addressed to all nations and therefore to human nature as a whole. Repentance involves, as we all know, not merely regret and sorrow for our faults and sins, and a resolve to amend our lives, but an entire change of mind. The nature of that change of mind is explained by the statement

that the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand. Until the Gospel reaches men and is apprehended by them, they are of necessity living only in the kingdom of nature and of this visible world. That is all that is open, either to their physical or to their moral senses. They do, indeed, recognise by nature, if their minds are not corrupted, some of the moral, as well as physical, laws by which their existence is surrounded and controlled ; but they have no clear knowledge of the constitution of that moral world, even in this life, and none whatever in the future. That is the inevitable case with the nations of whom our Lord speaks, to whom the Gospel has not yet been preached ; but must it not be acknowledged that it is too much the case also even in a nation like our own, to whom it is familiar in name ? Is it not the danger and the weakness of all of us that our daily thoughts are dominated by the sensible and social realities of this world, and that the realities and influences of an invisible world are obscured to us ? But our Lord came to reveal to us another world, another kingdom—a sphere of spiritual influences, beyond our natural observation, in the midst of which we were intended to live. It is a kingdom with laws and powers, just as much as the physical and social and political kingdoms we all recognise ; and He revealed it by proclaiming Himself to be the King of it. As its King, He commenced by proclaiming its laws, and the character

of the life men are called upon, and privileged, to live in it.

The Sermon on the Mount is a revelation of the spiritual and moral laws of this Kingdom, and the whole of our Lord's teaching is a continuous revelation of the conditions of life—moral and spiritual—within it. The most complete description of it is to say that it is a life in harmony with Him, with His character and His will. It is a kingdom, moreover, which extends beyond this world and this life, into our existence, our eternal existence, after death. When He had passed from this mortal life, His Apostles assure us, as His witnesses, that He was living in that spiritual realm, and that we should some day pass into it. "If," says St. Paul, "ye be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affections on things above, not on things on the earth." And he goes on to describe those things above as the spiritual and moral graces of our Lord's teaching and example. "Put on, therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, long-suffering, forbearing one another, and forgiving one another. . . . And above all things put on love. . . . And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts. . . . Whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks unto God the Father by Him."

That is the Kingdom of God which our Lord brought near to us, to live in which, hereafter, would be our bliss, and to be banished from which would be our misery. There is some tendency in the present day to think of the Kingdom of God as if it meant a happier and juster state of society in the present world, and as though it could be created among us by the re-construction of social, and even political, conditions. Now, undoubtedly, in proportion as men and women grow into harmony with those gracious characters and tempers which Christ reveals as the characteristics of His kingdom, the whole of their conduct in this world will develop an ever-increasing consideration for others, unselfishness, and love, which would be perpetually mitigating the hardships and injustices of the struggle of this world, and which would promote a very strong union among mankind. But the establishment of such influences in this world and this life does not constitute in itself the Kingdom of God. They are the results of the Kingdom of God ; but that kingdom itself is a spiritual realm, of which the chief realities are unseen, and of which the most momentous, because the eternal, part lies beyond this life, in the everlasting realm in which we hope to live in conscious and visible communion with its King. Now the repentance to which Christ calls men consists in the complete conversion of their minds and hearts towards this spiritual realm,

in subordinating to it all the interests and pleasures and attractions of this life, and submitting the whole of our life and conversation here to His personal influences, and His royal commands.

That is the first of the two great realities of which our Lord bids His disciples to be witnesses. The second is the forgiveness of sins. There are no words more familiar to human hearts ; but, perhaps, we hardly realise the immensity of the promise and revelation they convey. There is one fact respecting our condition here which no one can doubt, if he seriously reflects upon his experience ; and that is that we are all sinners. There are infinite degrees in this sinful condition, but no one has ever grown up, to take an active part in life, who is not painfully sensible of what one of the prayers of the Litany mercifully speaks of as “our infirmities,” or, as its concluding prayer expresses it, “our sins, negligences, and ignorances.” We make as little of them as we can in our daily life. By the gracious instinct which God has implanted in us, we make allowances for one another ; and we too easily make allowances for ourselves. But men and women must be unusually happy in their experience who are not sadly sensible of the innumerable and incalculable failures and faults, and sometimes grievous sins, of their lives, and of the harm they have consequently done to others, and of the good they have failed to do. I do not think we can feel

that our daily confession is any too strong. We own, and own every day, that "we have erred and strayed like lost sheep ; that we have followed too much the devices and desires of our own hearts ; that we have offended against God's holy laws ; that we have left undone those things that we ought to have done, and that we have done those things that we ought not to have done, and that there is no health in us" ; and if so, the expression in our Communion Service is also not too strong, when we say that "the burden of them is intolerable." It would, indeed, be intolerable if we could see them, as Christ sees them, in all their nakedness and all their deformity, all their inconsistency with the true life and character for which He designed us, all their reflex action upon others, all the sad consequences they tend to entail upon others, all their future and unending issues. It is this intolerable burden which drives even non-Christian people into cruel asceticism, in the hope of escaping from the burden of the flesh, and which has supported the growth in Christian theology of an elaborate system of purgatory, for the purifying of souls from the "defilements they have contracted in this miserable and naughty world," as one of our death-bed prayers too truly calls it.

It is to an experience and a realisation of this kind that the Apostles are bidden to come, from our Saviour, with the promise of the remission of sins—

not merely their personal forgiveness, but their remission—the undoing and repairing of all the diseases and injuries which our souls have suffered—our new creation, for it is nothing less—in the image of Christ and of God ; the assurance that the same mercy and blessing is extended to all who have shared our sins, if they accept the same gracious invitation ; and our ultimate establishment in all the perfection of the Kingdom of God, in which the will of God and of Christ is perfectly done. Do we adequately realise what a miracle this is ? It is a greater miracle than the original creation of nature, and of human nature. It was a classical proverb that “ even the gods could not undo what has been done ” ; but this forgiveness of sins approaches to that impossibility. It amounts at least to an undoing of the consequences of that which has been done. It is a realisation in the life of all the souls of the redeemed, as well as in the world at large, of the proclamation, “ Behold, I make all things new.” Perhaps, men and women would not take refuge in such dreams as Purgatory if they realised that it is not by any mere process of pain or discipline that this miracle can be wrought. It can only be by the Almighty Power of the Spirit of God, raising up the souls of men, almost from the dead, and breathing into them a new life, that sins can be forgiven in that complete sense of which our Lord and His Apostles assure us.

Here, then, are the two grand realities of which our Saviour in His last earthly words bids His Apostles to be the witnesses. The revelation of a supreme and eternal Kingdom in which men are to live here and hereafter, and a complete conversion from a mere worldly life, a sense of the evil and sin which their ignorance of that Kingdom has brought upon them ; and secondly, an assurance that if they are thus converted to the Kingdom of God, and to the communion and fellowship of its King, a complete regeneration will be bestowed upon them hereafter. They will receive the infinite blessing of the complete forgiveness of sins. All this is conveyed in the brief compass of these few words. This is the witness which our Lord entrusted to His disciples at His departure.

But let us, further, observe upon what these two momentous revelations are founded. The minds of the Apostles are opened to understand the Scriptures, and to realise that “thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer, and rise again from the dead, and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His Name among all nations.” The Scriptures, from first to last, are a revelation of the suffering which is entailed upon men by their loss of the vision, and the life, of the Kingdom of God. They are a continuous revelation of the truth, stated by St. Paul at the commencement of his proclamation of the Gospel, that as men “did not

like to retain God in their knowledge," He gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do things that are not fitting, to be filled with all unrighteousness and wickedness; and this ungodliness and unrighteousness culminated at last in the suffering and death of Christ. The more the prophets of the Old Testament meditated on life and history, the clearer the vision arose before them of One who would bring a complete revelation of God's will and of perfect righteousness, and that He would in consequence be the greatest of sufferers. The full evil and sin of men was not revealed, until, in the rejection and murder of our Lord, it was proved, as a terrible fact and reality, that by living without God, and by refusing to retain God and His will in their minds, men had been brought—Jews and Gentiles alike—to absolute moral ruin, and to the fearful consequences, even in the life of this world, in which that moral ruin involves them. The suffering and death of Christ, which was the first thing of which the Apostles were to bear witness, was the great and complete revelation of the sin of men, and of their hopeless misery if left to themselves.

But then follows the second point—the blessed remedy for all this ruin, namely, that Christ rose again the third day from the dead—from the death which wicked men had inflicted on Him—and sent a message of forgiveness and deliverance to all

mankind. In the light of the truths and considerations we have been reviewing, we may appreciate the surprising and extraordinary blessing of this revelation. Conceive for a moment what would have been our position if Christ had not returned from the grave with this message. The evil of men would have culminated in the destruction, and rejection from among them, of the King of truth and the Lord of all goodness and righteousness ; and there would have been no hope of any recovery from this ruin. But when Christ, notwithstanding His having been put to death and utterly rejected, reappears, and thus shows that He is superior to death, and to the destruction which men endeavoured to inflict upon Him ; when He reappears, moreover, with powers supreme over nature and all the ordinary conditions of life, and declares that He has come back to bring men forgiveness and deliverance, we then realise that a new creation has been revealed to us, that the Kingdom of Heaven, which our Lord began by proclaiming, is established in all its powers, and, in St. Peter's words, " that we are begotten again into a living hope by the Resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead." It is the Resurrection and its message, after the Death, which constitutes the glory of the Kingdom of God. Mankind, in the death of Christ, descends to the lowest depths of wickedness and despair, and when Christ, in His

Resurrection, proves that He is superior to all that deadly evil, He establishes a claim to perfect trust. When He brings, even to His murderers and to all mankind, the promise of forgiveness of sins and of regeneration, He commands our trust, our love, and absolute devotion. In a word, the two great realities of Christ's life correspond to the two great realities of human nature. Our sins correspond to Christ's death; our forgiveness to His Resurrection. The sins of mankind actually inflicted His death, and were the sole cause of it. His Resurrection and His message are the grand evidence, the only evidence, of His victory over evil and of the possibility of our forgiveness.

Thus it is that Christ concentrates, as I began by saying, in His last earthly words the whole message of the Gospel. It is written in the Scriptures of the Old Testament beforehand, and established by the Scriptures of the New Testament, that Christ should suffer, and should rise again the third day, and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His Name among all nations. The same Gospel is expressed in one verse by St. Paul, at the end of the fourth chapter of the Epistle to the Romans, where he says that our Lord "was delivered up for our offences, and was raised again for our justification." God grant that we may so repent of our offences as to share in that justification.

XIX

THE KINGDOM ESTABLISHED

"They therefore, when they were come together, asked Him, saying, Lord, dost Thou at this time restore the kingdom to Israel ? And He said unto them, It is not for you to know times or seasons, which the Father hath set within His own authority. But ye shall receive power, when the Holy Ghost is come upon you : and ye shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judæa and Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth. And when He had said these things, as they were looking, He was taken up ; and a cloud received Him out of their sight. And while they were looking stedfastly into heaven as He went, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel ; which also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye looking into heaven ? this Jesus, which was received up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye beheld Him going into heaven."—ACTS i. 6-11.

XIX

THE KINGDOM ESTABLISHED

WE have considered the last of our Saviour's words to His disciples which are recorded for us as having been spoken to them in the course of those forty days, during which He appeared to them from time to time and spoke of things pertaining to the Kingdom of God. During those days, He mixed with them in ordinary intercourse, speaking to them evidently as He had done of old, and we are told generally that the subject of His teaching was "the things concerning the Kingdom of God." This brief intimation is of the greatest importance in itself, and throws a light upon the final question of the Apostles to Him, and His answer to it. The Kingdom of God, of which He spoke to them, had been from the first, as we saw, the central subject of His preaching and teaching. His great purpose was to reveal and establish a kingdom, an invisible kingdom, in which men should be subject to His rule as representing His Father, until the time came when He should surrender it into His Father's hands, and "God should be all in all."

If we consider the facts of history, we shall realise at once that this is what was actually done. Historically considered, the one great difference between the world before Christ's time, and the world since then, has been the existence of the Christian Church. It appeared in the world immediately after our Lord's departure, as a new society, consisting of men who lived in union with one another, observing certain rules of life, acknowledging the supreme authority of an invisible Lord, one who, as the Roman Governor said, "was dead," but whom they "affirmed to be alive"; meeting together to worship Him; seeking their instruction and guidance in the records of His life, and in letters addressed to them by His intimate followers. It was in this character that they were soon recognised by the rulers of the Roman Empire; it was on account of their presenting this character that they were persecuted. The Romans would have no society and no kingdom but that of the Empire; and no king, and at last no God, but the Emperor. They realised at once that a rival authority in the order of social life, and in general, had been set up, one that was not confined to a single nation like that of the Jews, but claiming submission from the whole Empire and the world. The first three centuries after Christ's Ascension exhibit the history of a sustained and deadly struggle between these two kingdoms or empires. It was a war in

which torrents of blood were shed. The Christians, indeed, never resorted to force ; they never even resisted by force ; they followed their Lord's example, and obeyed to the letter His precepts in the Sermon on the Mount. When they were reviled, they reviled not again ; when they suffered, they threatened not ; but committed themselves unto Him that judgeth righteously. Apart from the obligation of their obedience to Him, and of following His example, they possessed one momentous motive which gave them an immense advantage over their pagan persecutors. They were assured that the Kingdom of Christ in which they lived was not a kingdom of this world only ; but when they died they did but pass into the most glorious realm of that Kingdom, and would be welcomed and blessed by its King. By those weapons of patience and faith they prevailed, and at length, after three centuries, the Kingdom of the Cæsars recognised the Kingdom of the Christ, and He was acknowledged by the Roman Emperors to be their supreme Lord, the " King of kings, and Lord of lords."

It is well for us to realise, with more distinctness perhaps than we are wont to do, that the Kingdom of God, which was the subject of our Lord's last conversations with His disciples, is not a mere image, but a reality ; a reality as great as any kingdom of this world, and indeed greater ; because it endures to all generations upon earth,

and will endure moreover for ever in heaven. As I said, it has made the great difference between ancient and modern history, for since it was finally established at our Lord's Ascension, it has been perpetually alive, and working side by side with all the kingdoms of this earth ; sometimes opposing, sometimes supporting them ; but always exerting a spiritual force upon secular forces, and maintaining a permanent standard of morality and duty. Such, for instance, has been, and still is, the position of the Church in our country and empire at this time, and throughout our history. It has, alas, failed to rise to the ideal which our Lord intended ; and has sometimes fallen far below it ; and in consequence of its faults and corruptions, it has for a long time been divided against itself, and consequently exposed to the danger of a house divided against itself. But throughout our whole history, and even in its divided state, its ministers have discharged the function which Christ here committed to His Apostles—they have been witnesses unto Him. Whether Roman, or Anglican, or Free Churchmen, they have preached Christ, they have proclaimed His laws ; and tried to enforce them throughout the length and breadth of the land. To the mass of our people, however wilful they may be, the Name of Christ and the teaching of Christ are authorities to which they bow ; and against which they are reluctant, even in their

errors and passions, to rebel ; and the Kingdom of Christ, the rule of Christ, is thus the one permanent force among us. Dynasties may change, constitutions may be altered, kings and laws may be modified ; science may revolutionise our daily life and thoughts. But the Kingdom of God over the hearts and consciences of men, a Society of men bound together under that rule of life, acknowledging at least that they ought to obey it in all things, and looking first to it for determining their fate, their happiness or unhappiness, after death—this Kingdom, amidst all its faults and failures, is the one permanent authority among us now ; and it may be added that it exists throughout Europe, and is spreading by missionary effort throughout the world. It is the one permanent influence to which men are looking for the establishment of peace on earth, and good will among men.

This, then, is what our Lord was speaking of in His last words to His disciples—the Kingdom of God. Can we not imagine something of the intense eagerness with which they must have listened to their Master and King, immediately after the death in which He had endured the final assaults of those who had hated and rejected Him, of the Devil himself, and his agents on earth ; and after the Resurrection in which He had manifested Himself to them as a Conqueror in this desperate battle, as superior to all human and natural powers ?

When He spoke to them of a Kingdom, He spoke as one who had fought His way, through blood and agony, to triumph, and whom they now saw in the actual possession of supreme spiritual and physical power. What, then, more natural than that as He had been speaking to them, all this time, of the Kingdom of God, they should ask Him at last, when they were come together at His summons for some special purpose, probably for their farewell in this world, a question about that Kingdom, and when and how it was to be established ? They asked Him, accordingly, " Lord, dost Thou at this time restore the Kingdom to Israel ? "

This question has, perhaps, been much misunderstood, and the considerations just reviewed, combined with our Lord's answer, place it in a light which shows that it was not unworthy of the Apostles at that time. The misunderstanding to which I refer is, that it has often been regarded as showing that the minds of the disciples were still occupied by those imperfect conceptions of the Messianic Kingdom which were generally prevalent among the Jews ; that they were still looking for the forcible establishment of a temporal kingdom, in which the Jews would be supreme over the Gentile nations, and a Jewish Messiah would establish His supremacy over the world by force. But, in the first place, they must have been more spiritually obtuse than we have any right to think them, if, after receiving

during forty days such intimate instruction as our Lord had given them, after listening a few hours before to that great spiritual commission which St. Luke records, their thoughts had been full of mere worldly prospects and of a temporal kingdom. Our Lord's answer seems to be a decisive reason for putting a more Christian interpretation on their question. It seems very observable that He does not rebuke them, as He often did during His ministry, when they betrayed unworthy conceptions of His character and His work. Above all, He does not say that the kingdom would not be restored to Israel. He says not one syllable to deprecate that hope. He only tells them that it is not for them to know the times and the seasons, which the Father had set within His own power. It amounts practically to an allowance of their expectation ; it merely represses an undue curiosity as to the time when it would be realised. He bids them restrain their minds from such speculations, and devote themselves simply to the work with which He had entrusted them. "Ye shall receive power," He said, "when the Holy Ghost has come upon you : and ye shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judæa and Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth." Their whole soul was to be concentrated on that duty ; and they were to leave the results, and the times and seasons when those results were to be

accomplished, to the Father on whose secret will they depended.

But, it must be further asked, did our Lord then mean in His last word before His Ascension to give encouragement to the Jewish idea that the kingdom would be restored to Israel ? The answer will be evident if we ask, What kingdom ? It was but one kingdom of which our Lord had been speaking, and but one kingdom, we cannot but believe, respecting which His Apostles' inquiry was directed ; and that was the spiritual, moral, and Heavenly Kingdom of which He had been explaining the nature to them. If you consider the Apostles' inquiry to be concerned with that kingdom, what was there unworthy in it ? and why should our Lord have discouraged them ? What do we see in the present day ? Of the Kingdom on which we have been meditating, that Kingdom of righteousness and peace and joy, our Lord is King, and like all kings He has His ministers and messengers, the subordinate authorities who proclaim His laws, who explain and supplement them ; and who are they ? Who but those Apostles, those men of Israel, whom He had chosen to be His followers and representatives when He was upon earth ? We have seen that, side by side with all the temporal powers on this earth, there is another Kingdom and other Law-Givers, under whose authority we live ; and, next to our Saviour, who are they but

men of Israel like Peter and John and Paul—Jews, who were mere fishermen of Galilee, but who were taken, like the simple out of the dust, that our Lord might set them among princes, and make them heirs of His authority and honour ? It may well be that the Apostles did not at first fully realise that this was the form in which the kingdom would be restored to Israel ; but they evidently felt that our Lord was establishing a real kingdom, and they could not but wonder what part would be taken in it by His own people and followers. But the Apostles were as much the Ministers of Christ, in the sense of which we speak of Ministers of State, as any earthly authorities under a temporal king. The Epistles of the New Testament, the exhortations and rules of life laid down by their authors, have ever been accepted by the Christian Church as enjoying the authority of utterances of ministers of Christ, and as speaking to us in His Name. After Christ Himself, the real rulers of a Christian country like this are the men of Israel, to whose solemn words we listen in our church, and to whose influence we submit ourselves, it is to be hoped, day by day. The Messianic Kingdom exists among us ; Jesus is the Messiah, and the Apostles whom He commissioned are its Princes.

In view of this character of the Kingdom of God, we shall appreciate, in some degree, the wisdom and the grace of the action which our Lord

now took for its immediate development. Had He remained visible on earth, even if continuing to appear only at intervals, and had His only communications with them been by flesh and blood, they could only have seen Him occasionally, and He could not have maintained His guidance among them always, and still less among all His followers. But He had clearly explained to them, in His last discourses, that there was a Spirit, in union with Him and His Father, who knew all His Father's will and all His own, and who was able, by spiritual means, to be to their spirits all that He Himself had been, who was able to be His Representative, His Advocate, a Comforter and an Adviser to them. He could bring all things to their remembrance, whatsoever He had told them. He is the Spirit of truth, able to guide them into all truth. "He shall take of Mine," said our Lord, "and shall declare it unto you. All things that the Father hath are Mine, therefore said I, that He shall take of Mine and shall declare it unto you." This Divine Spirit could, like God Himself, be present with all of them everywhere, and could thus rule and guide their hearts in union with the will of the Father and the Son. For this reason, as our Lord Himself said, it was expedient for them that He should go away, "for," He said, "if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you, but if I depart I will send Him unto you."

Our Lord, therefore, left them, and ascended to the right hand of God. That does not mean that He withdrew from further action. What is called His "session," His sitting down at the right hand of God, does not mean that He has ceased to act in the world. The right hand of God is, of course, a Scriptural image derived from the experience of earthly kings. The right hand of a king is the source and instrument of action, and the meaning is very much that of our familiar expression when we speak of a man being a king's or commander's "right hand." It means that Christ is the actual Ruler of the world, but He remains invisible to us, for reasons of which we have no knowledge, and He acts invisibly by the secret influences of His Spirit. The reality of that spiritual action was shown very soon by the immense energies, the new powers, spiritual, mental, and physical, with which the Apostles were endued a few days after the Ascension; and we have ourselves the plain evidence of it in the marvellous wisdom and spiritual force of the writings they have left to us. By that Spirit our Lord proceeded at once to create His Church, called out in it, within a very few years, some men to be Apostles, some to be prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, some workers of miracles, some speakers of new tongues and some interpreters, so that members of the Kingdom might attain, in the unity of the faith and in the knowledge

of the Son of God, unto the measure of the standard of the fulness of Christ Himself ; that they might be one body, speaking the truth in love, and representing His will and purpose to the world. In the words of St. Mark, which in their intense depth and brevity bear as strong marks of inspiration as any in the New Testament, " So then the Lord Jesus, after He had spoken unto them, was received up into heaven, and sat down at the right hand of God, and they went forth, and preached everywhere, the Lord working with them and confirming the word by the signs that followed."

The Lord who thus died and rose, and ascended into Heaven, and sent His Spirit to His Apostles and followers, is still working at the right hand of God, and in proportion to our faith in Him, our prayer to Him and our obedience to Him, we too, may hope to be blessed by signs following. May this Eastertide confirm our faith in these gracious truths of the Kingdom of God, and so help us forward in the right way, to the promotion of that Kingdom in this world, and to its full enjoyment in the world to come.

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